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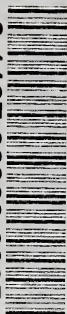
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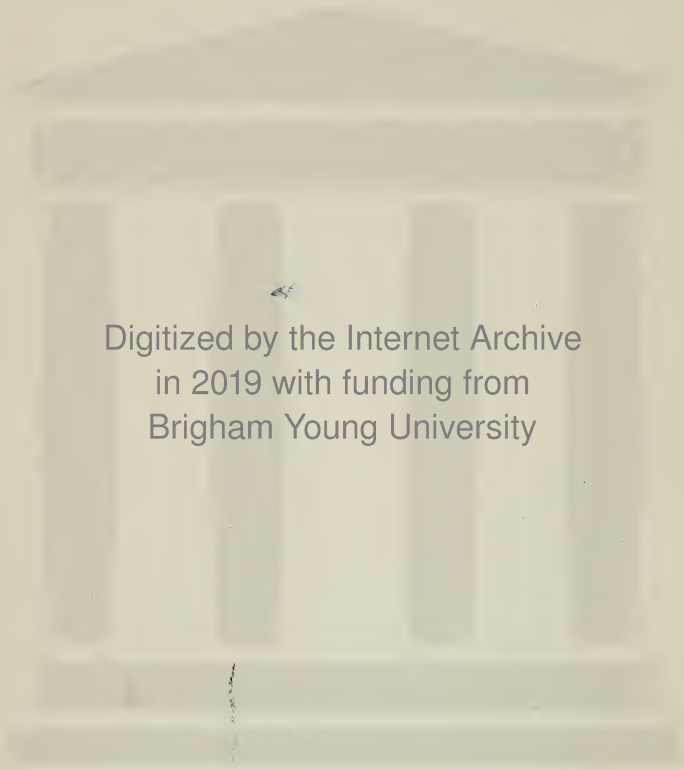
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HIS MAJESTY'S EMBASSY
& OTHER PLAYS

*OTHER WORKS BY MAURICE
BARING.*

*THE PUPPET SHOW OF MEMORY
OVERLOOKED.*

PASSING-BY.

*ROUND THE WORLD IN ANY NUMBER
OF DAYS.*

R.F.C.H.Q.

POEMS: 1914-1919.

THE GLASS MENDER.

DIMINUTIVE DRAMAS.

DEAD LETTERS.

LOST DIARIES.

COLLECTED POEMS.

*LANDMARKS IN RUSSIAN LITERA-
TURE.*

A YEAR IN RUSSIA.

THE RUSSAIN PEOPLE.

*THE GREY STOCKING AND OTHER
PLAYS.*

HIS MAJESTY'S EMBASSY & OTHER PLAYS

BY
MAURICE BARING

BOSTON
LITTLE, BROWN, AND COMPANY
1923

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HIS MAJESTY'S EMBASSY.
A COMEDY IN THREE ACTS.

To M. S.

PERSONS OF THE PLAY.

SIR HEDWORTH LAWLESS, G.C.B., Ambassador.
JOHN CAREY, Councillor.
HERBERT NAPIER, 1st Secretary.
HENRY SWAYNE, 2nd Secretary.
ARCHIBALD WHITE, 2nd Secretary.
ROBERT BYNG, 3rd Secretary.
PAUL SINGLETON, 3rd Secretary,
GEORGE LEE-ROBERTS, Attaché.
HON. RUPERT MERVYN, Honorary Attaché.
COLONEL DARTREY, Military Attaché.
POTEMKIN, 2nd Secretary at the Russian Embassy.
CARLO SAN PAOLO, 1st Secretary at the Italian Embassy.
CAREGGI, Chargé d'Affaires at the Italian Embassy.
LADY LAWLESS.
CICELY LAWLESS, her step-daughter.
MADAME SAN PAOLO.
MADAME POTEMKIN.
MRS. HYDE.
MRS. CAREY.
MR. APPLEBY, a Journalist.
WILLIAMS, Chancery Servant.
FOOTMAN.
MISS ELEONORA WILSON, an Actress.
Two Actors.

ACT I: Councillor and First Secretary's Room at the British Embassy, of any Capital.

ACT II: SCENE I. Garden at the British Embassy.

SCENE II. The Chancery.

ACT III: SCENE I. Drawing room at the British Embassy.

SCENE II. Platform at a Railway Station.

The action takes place in twenty-four hours.

ACT I.

The room belonging to Head of the Chancery in the Chancery of H.M. Embassy. One door, R., beyond the writing-table leads into the Councillor's room. Another, L.C., into the passage. [R. and L. are the Right and Left of the audience.] A writing-table, R., a leather arm-chair between the table and the stage, fireplace, L. A few caricatures from Vanity Fair on the wall. Enter HERBERT NAPIER, 35, busy, cheerful, intelligent-looking, well dressed. He sits down at the table and opens a series of letters and pneumatic telegrams. He rings.

Enter WILLIAMS.

NAPIER. Just telephone to Madame de Portofino, and say I'll be delighted to come to luncheon at half-past twelve.

WILLIAMS. Very good, sir.

NAPIER. And ask Mr. Lee-Roberts to come here.

WILLIAMS. Mr. Lee-Roberts has gone out, sir.

NAPIER. [*with a movement of impatience*]. Well, anyone who's there. Hasn't the bag come?

WILLIAMS. Yes, sir, but none of the gentlemen have arrived yet.

Enter CAREY from the Councillor's Room. He is 45 years old, grey haired, dyspeptic, dressed in a black cut-away coat.

CAREY. Hullo, you're back at last. How did you enjoy the Mont Dore?

NAPIER. Of course, it was very tiresome, but I managed to amuse myself, and I think it did my asthma good.

CAREY. I daresay it's more amusing than this place. Anything in the telegrams? I suppose we've climbed down as usual.

NAPIER. They haven't opened the bag yet. Lee-Roberts has gone out, and the others haven't come. You really must speak to those boys. Lee-Roberts is resident clerk. He and Byng live in the house, and they're neither of them ever there. Lee-Roberts is always having a Sanskrit lesson. And as for Bobby, he's hopeless. Besides getting into these terrible money rows, he treats the Chancery just like a club, and comes here to read the newspapers. We shall have to get the F.O. to send us someone else—we're very short-handed as it is—and with all this going on.

CAREY. A new sportsman has arrived since you went away—Singleton—nice boy, totally unfitted for the service.

Enter BYNG, 32, dressed in flannels with a good deal of care; clean, cool and casual.

BYNG. I suppose there's no objection to my going to the races this afternoon?

NAPIER. [*crossly*]. Yes, there is. You can't go to the races. The Ambassador's sure to telegraph. Where is everybody? And have you opened the bag?

BYNG. Lee Roberts is pursuing his studies. Swayne is smoking his morning pipe. White is giving his morning curse to the Chancery servants. And Singleton, I suppose, is doing his duty by the bag.

CAREY. Would it be too much to ask you to go and see if they have opened the bag?

BYNG. Charmed.

He goes out whistling.

NAPIER. They think they're sent here to go to the races. It's not as if they knew anybody here. They're useless as clerks. They know nobody. They go nowhere.

CAREY. Except to music halls. I believe our young friend has almost too many acquaintances there.

Enter WILLIAMS with a red box. He goes out again.
NAPIER *opens the box and takes out a sheet of paper, which he reads.*

NAPIER. The Ambassador has sent down to say that Princess Charles of Saxe-Altenburg arrives at one, and we must all go to the station.

CAREY. Frock-coats, I suppose.

NAPIER. You can go like that perfectly. Is there any news?

CAREY. No. We're sure to climb down. We always do. I haven't seen a soul. But then we never are asked anywhere now. Madame von Langenburg cut me in the street yesterday, which considering she's an American, I thought rather a large order.

NAPIER. I met old Gi-Gi in the street this morning. He was dining with the Russians last night, where they said there won't be war.

CAREY. Well, I don't care. I'm going on leave to-morrow.

Enter LEE-ROBERTS, 24, intelligent-looking, scholarly face.
He gives NAPIER some docketed despatches.

LEE-ROBERTS. I'm sorry I was late. I went to my Chinese man, and I couldn't get a cab for ages.

NAPIER [*peevishly*]. You can't have Chinese lessons on bag days. And why can't he come here?

LEE-ROBERTS. He won't. He's a wonderful scholar. He translates Shakespeare into Chinese.

NAPIER. If you live in the house you must do resident clerk's work. That's what you're here for. When Carey came this morning nobody had opened the bag, and nobody was here.

LEE-ROBERTS. I know, it was my fault. I forgot about the bag.

NAPIER [*looking at the despatches*]. Is this all there is in?

LEE-ROBERTS. Yes, Carey's got the telegrams.

NAPIER [*looking at a despatch*]. What's this? Oh! really this is

too bad. The F.O. have sent back this enclosure because they couldn't read it. Who wrote this out?

LEE-ROBERTS. I don't know.

NAPIER. Whose writing is it? Bobby's, I suppose. Whose else could it be?

LEE-ROBERTS. I suppose it is.

NAPIER. Well, the Ambassador will be furious, and if he says anything to me, I really can't stick up for Bobby any longer. He doesn't take the slightest trouble about any little thing.

Enter BYNG.

BYNG. Those silly asses in the Western Department have forgotten to send me my cigarettes.

NAPIER. Look here, Bobby. Did you write this out?

BYNG. It looks rather like my writing, but perhaps its a forgery.

NAPIER. Well, the F.O. have sent it back because they can't read it.

BYNG. How like them! They might at least have somebody who knows how to read.

NAPIER. Just look at it! It's scrawled anyhow, and covered with smudges. It's simply disgraceful to let us send off a thing like this. You really are too tiresome, Bobby. The Ambassador was furious with you when I went away. It's too silly of you, if you want to stay here, not to try and take a little trouble at least about these sort of things.

BYNG [*making a noise like a motor*]. Pip, pip.

NAPIER. I really mean it. Why can't you typewrite like the others?

BYNG. I'm not such a fool. I've never learnt and I never shall. Typewriting is like bridge. If one knows how to, one's made to do it all day. If one doesn't know one's left alone. Besides, I'm afraid of spoiling my handwriting.

NAPIER. Well, I give you up. What do you expect me to say to the Ambassador?

BYNG. You won't show that to his Ex.?

NAPIER. Well, I don't know what to do. Tell those boys they've all got to be at the railway station at a quarter to one—and not dressed like that—but frock-coats and top-hats—to meet Princess Charles.

BYNG. But I'm having luncheon out.

NAPIER. So was I, and you've just got to give it up.

BYNG. Did you come back by the night train?

NAPIER. No, I got home last night.

BYNG. Singleton's here.

NAPIER. So I hear. I don't know him. What's he like?

BYNG. He's what they call a "good clerk." That is to say, he makes a fuss about things which don't matter. He rolls his r's when he talks French. He leaves cards. He's good-looking. He plays bridge. He goes to the races. He lays down the law about foreign politics and French acting. He's always wrong. In fact, he's an ideal diplomat.

NAPIER. Oh!

BYNG. He gets on the Ambassador's nerves—especially at bridge—but Lady Lawless takes him for drives, and he reads out French poetry to her.

NAPIER. Oh! How is the Ambassador?

BYNG. They say he's very ill. It didn't prevent him cursing me for twenty minutes the day before yesterday. I thought the roof would come off. He said he thinks no more of getting me sent away than of squashing a fly on the window-pane. It's the tenth time he's said that to me.

NAPIER. What have you been doing?

BYNG. Some silly shop sent a bill to my father for flowers. My father wrote to the Ambassador.

NAPIER. He won't put up with you for ever.

BYNG. Besides you, I'm the only person he can talk to at

the Embassy. But I warn you, he's in a bad temper just at present.

NAPIER. Now go away. I want to get on with my work.

BYNG. They say there's not going to be a war after all.

*He goes out. NAPIER begins reading the despatches.
CAREY walks into his room. Enter WHITE, WHITE is 35,
hair a little bit grey, untidy, fussy.*

WHITE. I say, Bertie.

NAPIER [*impatiently*]. Well, what is it?

WHITE. I say, you simply must get the Ambassador to ask the F.O. for a new clerk. We can't go on like this. Bobby doesn't do a stroke of work. He sits up all night. He gets up about eleven, strolls down here and reads the newspapers, and in the afternoon he goes to the races. Lee-Roberts is almost as bad. He's always reading Chinese and he can't typewrite a bit. Singleton and I have to do everything, and we can never go to the races now. It is rather hard luck on us.

NAPIER. You've got Mervyn.

WHITE. He's very willing, of course, but he's no good at anything except writing out.

NAPIER. I'll see what I can do.

*Enter MERVYN : 24, but absurdly young looking. He
does not look more than 18.*

MERVYN. Bertie, there's a man in the waiting room who says he's got a system which'll make conscription in England popular. He won't say what it is unless he's paid. What shall I say?

NAPIER. Is he a British subject?

MERVYN. No, he's an Italian, born in Guatemala.

NAPIER. Then get rid of him.

MERVYN. Oh! all right.

Enter CAREY. WHITE and MERVYN go out.

CAREY. Here are the telegrams, and I say, the Chief wants a short despatch about the strike. He asked me to do it, but I propose to hand it over to you.

NAPIER. All right. Have you seen him?

CAREY. Yes, he's not going away. He says he can't yet. My wife says she thinks he's devilish seedy.

NAPIER. Is there anything in the telegrams?

CAREY. No, nothing. Oh! Hayward's got Copenhagen. Just my luck again, to have him put over my head.

NAPIER. But he isn't being promoted over your head—a councillor—

CAREY. Don't. You know as well as I do that he'll be given an embassy next—directly almost. They've only sent him to Copenhagen for a moment for decency's sake, and then he'll get Berlin, and I shall never get an embassy as long as I live. Why I ever joined the beastly service I don't know.

Enter WILLIAMS.

WILLIAMS [*To NAPIER*]. The Ambassador would like to speak to you, sir.

NAPIER. Very well, I'm coming. [*To CAREY*] I'll do that despatch. [*To WILLIAMS*] I want to-day's *New York Herald*. I suppose I can get it out of that. [*To CAREY*] Is there anything in the papers about it?

CAREY. An article in last night's *Gazette*.

NAPIER [*To WILLIAMS*]. And get me last night's *Gazette*.

WILLIAMS *goes out, followed by NAPIER. CAREY goes into his room. Enter BYNG.*

BYNG [*at the door*]. I say, Bertie—oh!— [*Shouts into the passage*] He's gone.

Enter LEE-ROBERTS.

LEE-ROBERTS. I suppose he's gone up to the Chief.

BYNG. We'll see if he's taken the despatches with him. [*Looks at the table.*] No, here they are. I can't find it.

Enter WHITE.

WHITE. I say, Byng, you've made another *lâche*. You entered that despatch about Nigerian sugar, *African*, and it ought to be *Commercial*.

BYNG. In the rough register?

WHITE. Yes.

BYNG. I haven't touched the rough register for days.

WHITE [*to LEE-ROBERTS*]. Then it's you.

LEE-ROBERTS. I beg your pardon. I didn't do anything of the kind.

Enter SWAYNE: 40, beard, an eye-glass.

SWAYNE. I suppose you know you've got to be at the station at 12.45. [*To BYNG*] You can't go dressed like that.

BYNG. I don't think I shall go. I've got an appointment.

SWAYNE. As you please, my dear fellow, I don't care. I don't care if they send you to Rio—it's a damned sight better place than this. Where's Bertie?

LEE-ROBERTS. He's gone up to the Chief.

SWAYNE. Is he restored to health?

BYNG. Oh yes, and in no end of a fuss. I say, Swayne, why does diplomacy, which is the profession in which there's nothing to do at all, make people feel as if they were overworked?

SWAYNE. You're not overworked. You go to Constantinople and then see if there's nothing to do in diplomacy.

WHITE [*to BYNG*]. You have nothing to do because everyone else has to do your work. I've never seen such a Chancery in my life.

SWAYNE. Well, where's that despatch?

LEE-ROBERTS [*looking at the table*]. I can't find it.

SWAYNE [*to BYNG*]. I suppose you've burnt it.

BYNG. No, I only did that in the F.O. when cases lasted too long.

SWAYNE. Well, I must go and pop on a frock-coat.

WHITE. So must I.

SWAYNE and WHITE go out.

BYNG. What's Singleton doing?

LEE-ROBERTS. Lady Lawless sent for him. [BYNG whistles a tune.] Last night we dined over the way. Lady Lawless made Singleton sing after dinner. What do you think he sang?

BYNG. What?

LEE-ROBERTS. "One word is too often profaned." When he came to "the desire of the moth for the star," you should have seen his expression.

BYNG. And her's?

LEE-ROBERTS. Oh! she's amused. She treats him like—you know.

BYNG. I suppose I ought to change.

Enter NAPIER.

NAPIER. Now, run away, you people. I've got to write a despatch, and don't forget the station—12.45.

LEE-ROBERTS and BYNG go out. NAPIER looks through the New York Herald. He folds a piece of blue foolscap paper in two and begins writing, then he stops, and rings.

Enter WILLIAMS.

NAPIER. Williams, tell them to telephone to Madame de Portofino and say that Mr. Napier's very sorry he won't be able to come to luncheon to-day, because he's got to go to the station to meet Princess Charles of Saxe-Altenburg.

WILLIAMS. Very good, sir.

NAPIER. And, Williams, I shall want this article in the *Gazette* cut out presently and pasted.

WILLIAMS. Very good, sir.

He goes out. NAPIER begins writing very rapidly, glancing every now and then at the New York Herald. Enter WILLIAMS. He announces MRS. HYDE, and goes out: she is about 40, well dressed.

MRS. HYDE. How are you, Bertie? May I come in a minute?

NAPIER. Marie! I'm delighted to see you. Come and sit down.

MRS. HYDE *sits down in the arm-chair next to the table.*

MRS. HYDE. Well, I've been spending my whole time ringing up your flat and the Embassy. I thought you were never coming back. At your flat they said you were coming back yesterday.

NAPIER. How long have you been here?

MRS. HYDE. Only a week. I'm going to Munich the day after to-morrow for the Mozart Festival, and then to Gastein, and then to Scotland.

NAPIER. Are you staying at the Ritz?

MRS. HYDE. Yes, I stayed on, on purpose to see you. Of course, there's not a soul here; but the Lawless's have been most awfully kind. I've dined with them every night.

NAPIER. How do you think he is?

MRS. HYDE. My dear, I believe he's very ill. The doctors say it's neuritis, but I believe that's all nonsense. I believe it's his heart. Anyhow, they all say he ought to go away. He won't. I suppose it is difficult just now. Is there going to be a war?

NAPIER. We haven't heard anything fresh. I don't think there will be.

MRS. HYDE. I don't think there will be. Sir Hedworth doesn't seem to think so either. I asked him if he'd go, if things settled down, but he was quite vague. He says he likes being here in summer.

NAPIER. I've only seen him for a second this morning. He didn't say anything about going. I think he looks most awfully ill.

MRS. HYDE. Of course he ought to go. She doesn't want to.

NAPIER. Why not?

MRS. HYDE. For heaven's sake, don't repeat this, but I believe she's got an excitement going on.

NAPIER. Not Gigi?

MRS. HYDE. No, something much younger.

NAPIER. Who?

MRS. HYDE. Your new attaché, I forget his name.

NAPIER. Singleton?

MRS. HYDE. Yes.

NAPIER. I see.

MRS. HYDE. Quite nice, you know, but I think he's awful.

NAPIER. And he?

MRS. HYDE. He wants to marry the girl, but I don't expect he's her sort. Lady Lawless treats her shamefully. She never lets her go anywhere, poor girl.

NAPIER. That's all very well. I like Cicely, but I do think she makes it difficult for Lady Lawless. Of course, you can laugh at Lady Lawless if you like; but I think she's a very clever woman. And all those people who come and see Sir Hedworth, and play at being his guardian angels, and treat her as if she was his evil genius, get on her nerves. Well, I understand it. As for Cicely, she never gave Lady Lawless a chance.

MRS. HYDE. She's looking very well.

NAPIER. Who? Cicely?

MRS. HYDE. No, Lady Lawless.

NAPIER. I admire her enormously. They don't here; but then they don't admire any of the people we admire.

MRS. HYDE. Now, look here, Bertie, if you're clever, you'll make Sir Hedworth go to Switzerland, or the sea, or somewhere. He could take Singleton with him as private secretary.

NAPIER. I don't believe she's preventing him.

MRS. HYDE. You're only saying that out of loyalty. You needn't be loyal with me.

NAPIER. No, I'm not. I think there's something else.

MRS. HYDE. You mean you think he wants to stay here.

NAPIER. Yes.

MRS. HYDE. Are the San Paolos here?

CAREY opens the door of his room, put his head in, sees

MRS. HYDE.

CAREY. I beg your pardon.

He shuts the door and goes back to his room.

NAPIER. Yes ; but they're by way of going to Washington soon.

MRS. HYDE. I see. That's why he doesn't want to go. But they've only been here a month, haven't they?

NAPIER. Yes, but Carlo San Paolo's terribly jealous. He never wanted to come here. He never lets her out of his sight. I'm sure he got the move arranged.

MRS. HYDE. Poor Sir Hedworth ! I thought that was all over.

NAPIER. Oh ! no, on the contrary. This is the first time they'd been at the same post.

MRS. HYDE. Where used he to see her?

NAPIER. It must always have been very difficult ; but sometimes she went to Biarritz, and one summer she was at Pontresina.

MRS. HYDE. Without him?

NAPIER. Yes, for a fortnight for the children's health. That was two years ago.

Enter WILLIAMS.

WILLIAMS. Mr. Appleby wants to know if he could see you, sir.

NAPIER [*to* MRS. HYDE]. That's the correspondent of the *Daily Truthteller*. [*To* WILLIAMS] Tell Mr. Swayne—no, I suppose I ought to see him.

MRS. HYDE [*getting up*]. My dear, don't bother about me. Come and have luncheon.

NAPIER. We've all got to be at the station at a quarter to one; but let's have dinner out of doors.

MRS. HYDE. Very well, I'll come and fetch you in a motor at half-past seven.

NAPIER. You see, I think I must see him. I've got a despatch to write about the strike, and then perhaps he knows something about the war.

MRS. HYDE [*laughing*]. Oh! Well, half-past seven. Au revoir.

NAPIER. Good-bye. Half-past seven. [*To WILLIAMS*] Show Mr. Appleby in here.

MRS. HYDE and WILLIAMS go out. NAPIER sits down at his table. WILLIAMS announces MR. APPLEBY: *about 36 years old, moustache, pince-nez, frock coat, affable.*

NAPIER. [*getting up and shaking hands*]. How are you? I've just come back from the Mont Dore.

APPLEBY. Yes. They told me you were away when I called last week. Not a very gay place, Mont Dore, is it?

NAPIER. No, I went there for my asthma. It's done me a great deal of good.

APPLEBY. There's a rumour going about that his Excellency is going to Berlin and that Sir Howard Churton is coming here. Is there anything in it?

NAPIER. No! That's all nonsense.

APPLEBY. Somebody was saying his Excellency hadn't been well lately.

NAPIER. It's been so hot, hasn't it, and of course all this time he's been hard-worked, just when he wanted to go on leave. But this morning he's really looking very well.

APPLEBY. Well, I can contradict that?

NAPIER. Certainly. That strike business is rather curious.

APPLEBY. Oh! that's nothing. I was at the Ministry this morning. It was purely a local row got up by the firebrands. It's all over now.

NAPIER. Oh! The newspapers seem very much calmer.

APPLEBY. I don't think myself there's a chance of a war now. The financiers don't think so either. Have you—

NAPIER. We've had no news at all. I'm afraid I've to rush off to the station now. We've got to go and meet Princess Charles of Saxe-Altenburg, who's arriving at half-past eleven. Do look in again when you're passing. Good-bye.

APPLEBY. Good-bye, Mr. Napier.

He goes out. NAPIER sits down at his table and goes on writing his despatch. CAREY comes in from his room.

CAREY. I think I'd better put on a frock-coat. I shall go home and go straight to the station. I shan't come back here again to-day.

NAPIER. Are you going to London?

CAREY. I'm going to Norfolk. I shall get a little partridge shooting and plenty of golf. I shan't be sorry to get away from this beastly hole, I can tell you.

NAPIER. Well, I shall see you at the station.

CAREY goes out. NAPIER goes on writing. Enter MERVYN.

MERVYN. There's a woman in the waiting room who wants to paint a miniature of the Ambassador. She wants to see you.

NAPIER. You must learn to get rid of these people. I'm writing a despatch. I really can't be bothered like this every minute.

MERVYN. It's all very well, Bertie, but I can't get rid of her. She won't go. She says she's a relation of Queen Victoria. I believe she's mad. She's been talking to me for twenty minutes.

NAPIER. If she's a British subject, send her to—

MERVYN. She's Swiss.

NAPIER. Then tell one of the Chancery servants to get rid of her—to say we can't do anything for her.

MERVYN. All right. Sorry, Bertie. [MERVYN goes out.]

NAPIER goes on writing. Enter COLONEL DARTREY: 40,
greyish hair, smart, military looking.

COL. DARTREY. Hullo, Bertie, glad to see you back. Enjoy yourself?

NAPIER [*going on writing*]. Oh! it wasn't bad.

COL. DARTREY. His Excellency says there won't be a war. But I believe he's wrong. I said there would be a war from the first. You see, it's impossible to settle the matter any other way. We can't climb down—

NAPIER [*absent-mindedly going on writing*]. No, I suppose not.

COL. DARTREY. And they can't either—

NAPIER [*still absent-mindedly*]. No.

COL. DARTREY. Look here, I want your advice about something. I've got a little dinner to-morrow for Madame Saintange, who is here for a few days. I've got the Rocheguyons, old Thérèse, and the Potemkins. How ought they to sit?

NAPIER [*looking up and really interested*]. Well, that is rather difficult.

COL. DARTREY. I couldn't get anyone else.

NAPIER. They always send in Madame Saintange first here—although she's no right to go in first; but it's impossible with the Rocheguyons. You'll offend Thérèse too.

COL. DARTREY. What can I do?

NAPIER. I should put off—no, I should tell the Rocheguyons you had put off the dinner, and ask them another night with the Potemkins. Then I should have your dinner for Madame Saintange, ask old Thérèse to do hostess, and get two or three men.

COL. DARTREY. Thanks awfully, but—

NAPIER. It's impossible to have Madame Saintange and the Rocheguyons together and to send in Madame Saintange first. Both Jean and Madame Jean would be mortally offended.

COL. DARTREY. Thanks, I'll do that. I suppose you can't come?

NAPIER. I'm afraid I can't. I'm dining with Mrs Hyde.

COL. DARTREY. Oh! yes.

He goes out. Enter SINGLETON and LEE-ROBERTS in black-coats. SINGLETON is 27, good looking, very smartly dressed.

LEE-ROBERTS [*to NAPIER*]. You know Singleton, don't you?

NAPIER [*getting up*]. How are you? No, I don't believe we have ever met.

SINGLETON. Except one day at the F.O. for a minute.

LEE-ROBERTS. The Ambassador wants to see you a minute, Napier.

NAPIER. Very well.

He rushes out of the room. Enter BYNG in a frock-coat, and WHITE.

WHITE. Well, let's have a look at you. My word, we are smart. Where did you get that tie?

BYNG. Davray's. I get everything there because he never sends in the bill.

WHITE. I get my shirts at Old England. Just as good and half as cheap as anywhere else.

SINGLETON. I get my shirts at a little man behind Pall Mall; jolly good he is, too.

Enter MERVYN, smoking a cigarette.

LEE-ROBERTS. I get my shirts at the stores, ready made.

SINGLETON. I assure you that's a mistake. They don't last.

LEE-ROBERTS. No shirts do.

MERVYN. They ruin everything in the wash. I get my shirts at Wimpole's. But I never can get him to make them set straight.

Enter SWAYNE.

SINGLETON. I tried Wimpole once. He's very good for ties, but not for shirts, and damned expensive.

MERVYN. They're all robbers.

SWAYNE. Perhaps when you've done talking about shirts somebody wouldn't mind sending off that note to the Ministry of War.

SINGLETON. I'll do it.

SWAYNE. Steady now. It hasn't been signed yet. You must take it up to the Chief.

SINGLETON. All right.

He goes out. Enter NAPIER.

NAPIER. Now get out, all of you. I must finish my despatch.

They all go except SWAYNE, who stands in front of the fire and lights a cigarette.

SWAYNE. How's the Chief?

NAPIER. Perfectly furious.

SWAYNE. Why? What's up?

NAPIER. Boots in his private letter mentioned the despatch which the F.O. had sent back—which was Bobby's, of course—and the Ambassador asked why he hadn't been told. He said he'd been kept in the dark. You know how he hates that. He was furious with me and said I was responsible, and heaven knows what he'll say to Bobby.

SWAYNE. He won't care. I believe he does it on purpose.

NAPIER. It's too idiotic of him, if he wants to stay here—

SWAYNE. That's it—but does he?

NAPIER. Oh! Yes, he does. He loves this place, and he loves all that Bohemian world he lives in.

SWAYNE. Well, he'll make this place too hot for him, if he doesn't look out. His father won't stand it, let alone the Chief.

NAPIER. Of course, the Ambassador and his father are the greatest friends, and he likes Bobby. That's why it's so silly of Bobby to annoy him by little things.

Enter LADY LAWLESS: handsome, about 36.

LADY LAWLESS. May I come in a minute?

NAPIER [*getting up*]. Oh do, Lady Lawless.

SWAYNE. I must go and look after those boys.

LADY LAWLESS. Come to luncheon, Mr. Swayne, after the station.

SWAYNE. I should like to very much.

He goes out.

LADY LAWLESS. I came over here because I want to see you without Hedworth being there. In fact, I want to talk to you about him. He's just seen the doctor. He says Hedworth is really better. He says Switzerland wouldn't do him any good. He says Salza Maggiore would be the right place now, but I know that would bore Hedworth. The doctor told me the great thing is that he should be occupied and amused and not bored. So I think the best thing is to keep him here for the present—you see, he doesn't want to go—and when things quiet down—Hedworth says there won't be war—to take him to Biarritz later. What do you think, Bertie? Am I right?

NAPIER. Did you tell the doctor about Biarritz?

LADY LAWLESS. Yes, he said it was the very thing.

NAPIER. I don't see how you can do anything else. I'm sure that nothing will make Sir Hedworth go away till things have more or less settled down, and I don't think he'll like Salza Maggiore. Which doctor was it?

LADY LAWLESS. Rollin; such a dear. So good looking, with just the right amount of sham rudeness and put-on common sense. You don't think I ought to insist on his going at once?

NAPIER. No, I don't, really.

LADY LAWLESS. Well, that's a comfort, because, you see, Hedworth's lady friends come purring up to me every day and say, "And when are you starting?" or, "Where are you going to spend the summer?" As if I were keeping Hedworth here against his will! and I'm sure they say to each other, "She won't let him go," or, "Poor Lady Lawless doesn't seem to see he's ill." The new naval attaché's wife came to see me yesterday, bristling with smartness, and said, "You

like this place in the summer, don't you, Lady Lawless?" And then, with crushing superiority, because her husband's the coming man in the navy, "You *like* the diplomatic service—"

NAPIER [*laughing*]. What did you say?

LADY LAWLESS. Oh! I looked modest and said, "Even in an Embassy a life may be well spent, as Marcus Aurelius says." [NAPIER *laughs*.] Oh! Bertie, I feel so crushed. Last week there were three ex-ambassadors here on their way to different watering places, and they all came to luncheon and dinner and pointed out the error of my ways, quite gently, you know, one little pin-prick after another. They seemed to know all the people I hadn't called on. They brought them out before Hedworth. They knew all about the people who'd been kind to me in Constantinople and Bucharest and Lisbon, and whom I had asked to luncheon and not to dinner. They knew all about the people who'd been dissatisfied with their place at dinner. They knew all about Marie Bahr acting that dreadful play here one night after dinner. They knew all about the night I was late for dinner when the Archduke was dining, only because my maid dropped my order into the bird-cage and we couldn't get it out. It was like the day of judgment conducted by female angels. On the third day, I went to bed and stayed there till they went away. Well, I'm glad you think I'm right.

NAPIER. I do.

LADY LAWLESS. We've got a new secretary since you were here. Such a nice boy. So polite, and he actually comes to luncheon and dinner, when he's asked; such a change from the others, who are always so busy.

NAPIER. I know, I've seen him.

LADY LAWLESS. By the way, we've had a lawn-tennis ground made in the garden for Cicely. She's going to have lawn-tennis every Thursday. She's got some people coming this afternoon. Will you tell them in the Chancery, in case any of them would like to play?

I must run now and get ready for the station to meet that darling Princess. I'm so glad you think I'm right.

She gets up and goes to the door, and NAPIER gets up and goes to open the door.

Oh! and I quite forgot, we've got a little dinner to-night for the San Paolos. He's going to-morrow. You'll come, won't you?

NAPIER. Well, Lady Lawless, I should love to, but as a matter of fact I'm half engaged. Mrs. Hyde is here, and she wants me to dine with her.

LADY LAWLESS. Bring her, too. I want another woman. You must come. After dinner I've got a little play—oh, quite a tiny thing—no stage or anything. It'll only last about ten minutes, Eleonora Wilson is doing it. She wants to do it in London at parties, and she begged me to let her try it here, and so, as she's an old flame of Hedworth's, and as I'm never jealous on principle, I said yes.

NAPIER. *I'll try and arrange it.*

LADY LAWLESS. That's right, you must.

NAPIER opens the door for her and she goes out. He goes back to his table and goes on writing. Enter WHITE.

WHITE. I say, one of the Grand Dukes has telephoned from the Ritz for a pass to take his bull-dog to London. He says Mervyn promised him to let him have it by this morning, and now Swayne says he can't have it.

NAPIER. Oh! let him have it.

WHITE. Swayne says he won't. He says the Ambassador wrote a minute about it last week; that nobody was to have one.

NAPIER. Then send Mervyn round to explain to him.

WHITE. Mervyn's gone home. He's going straight to the station.

NAPIER. Oh! you really are too tiresome. You must telephone to the Ritz and tell Swayne to write a civil letter explaining, but let me see it before it goes.

WHITE. All right.

NAPIER. And I want Louis.

WHITE *goes out*. NAPIER *goes on writing*. Enter WHITE.

WHITE. Louis has gone out.

NAPIER. Where? Why?

WHITE. Byng has sent him to get some theatre tickets.

NAPIER [*ringing the bell*]. He's no business to send the Chancery servants out in the morning. I've told him a dozen times. Where's André then?

WHITE. He's having his dinner.

Enter WILLIAMS.

NAPIER. As soon as Louis comes in, please ask him to take this note to Madame San Paolo, and to wait for an answer.

WILLIAMS. Madame San Paolo is downstairs, she asked if she could see you.

NAPIER. I'll come down.

WILLIAMS. She asked if she might come up, sir.

NAPIER. Certainly. [WILLIAMS *goes out*.] I shall never finish my despatch. [*He goes on writing*.] Has the Ambassador sent for Byng?

WHITE. Yes. It's happening now. I heard him across the yard.

NAPIER. Well, tell Swayne about the letter.

WHITE *goes out*. WILLIAMS *announces* MADAME SAN PAOLO *and goes out*. *An Italian lady, about 30. Her mother was half English. She is dark, graceful, natural. She talks perfect English. She is very simply dressed.*

NAPIER [*getting up*]. Well, how are you?

MADAME SAN PAOLO. I telephoned, and they said you'd come back, and then they cut me off, so I came round. I thought you wouldn't mind. I want the address of that shop you told me about. The man where one gets those *toiles imprimées*. We're going away, you know, to-morrow.

NAPIER. But not for good?

MADAME SAN PAOLO. No. That is to say, Carlo won't come back. He sails for America in three weeks, but he wants to see the boys before he goes, and he wants me to go with him. They're at Ravenna. So I've got to go. Then I shall come back here, and I don't expect to go to America for another six months.

NAPIER. I'd no idea it was settled about America.

MADAME SAN PAOLO. Carlo settled it all very suddenly. It's rather inconvenient my having to go to Italy to-morrow, but Carlo wanted me to spend his last weeks at home with him and the boys.

NAPIER. And you've been here such a short time.

MADAME SAN PAOLO. Carlo never wanted to come here. He always wanted Washington. They couldn't send him there straight from Vienna, so we had to come here. But he arranged it all. I'm very sorry. I love this place, and I don't want to go to Washington. Besides, so many of my friends are here now; you, and the Potemkins, and such a lot, and that happens so seldom in diplomacy, doesn't it?

NAPIER. It is too unlucky.

MADAME SAN PAOLO. Lady Lawless has very kindly got a farewell dinner for Carlo to-night. You'll be there, won't you?

NAPIER. She asked me, and I'm half engaged.

MADAME SAN PAOLO. But you *must* come.

NAPIER. I'll see if I can arrange it.

MADAME SAN PAOLO. How is Sir Hedworth?

NAPIER. *Really* better, I think.

MADAME SAN PAOLO. I'm so glad. Are they going away?

NAPIER. I believe not yet. They may go somewhere later.

MADAME SAN PAOLO. Oh! Well, I must go—oh! the address.

NAPIER. I'll write it down for you. [*He writes on an envelope.*]
Here it is.

MADAME SAN PAOLO [*taking the envelope*]. Thank you, so much; and you will come to-night, won't you? Shall I see you this afternoon? Cicely Lawless has asked me to come to her lawn-tennis party.

NAPIER. I'm afraid I can't come this afternoon. I'll try to come this evening. Good-bye.

He opens the door. MADAME SAN PAOLO goes out.

NAPIER [*calling*]. Williams.

Enter WILLIAMS.

NAPIER. Just telephone to the Ritz, and tell Mrs. Hyde that I must dine at the Embassy to-night because it's a farewell dinner, and say that Lady Lawless invites her, too, and that I hope she will come.

WILLIAMS. Very good, sir.

He goes out. Enter WHITE.

WHITE. Here's the letter. Swayne's gone to the station.

NAPIER [*reading it through*]. Oh! this will never do—I shall have to do it myself. Wait a minute. [*He very rapidly writes a note.*] There, have this sent off at once.

WHITE takes it and goes out. Enter WILLIAMS.

WILLIAMS. Mrs. Hyde says she will be very pleased to dine at the Embassy.

NAPIER. That's all right. And just telephone for a taxi for me at once.

WILLIAMS. Very good, sir.

WILLIAMS goes out. NAPIER gets up. Enter LEE-ROBERTS.

LEE-ROBERTS. Singleton and I have just deciphered a telegram. The F.O. say that our No. 9, Secret, is undecipherable.

NAPIER. That really is too much. Who cyphered it? Bobby, I suppose.

LEE ROBERTS. No, Carey insisted on doing it all by himself last night. He was in a temper over some *lâche*, and he said we didn't know how to cypher.

NAPIER. Well, I don't know what to do. You must go to the station. I shall have to tell the Ambassador at once. It's very

important. Tell Singleton to wait. I shan't go to the station; I shall have to cypher it again at once. [*Shouting through the door*] Williams.

WILLIAMS. Yes, sir.

NAPIER. Telephone to Madame de Portofino that I shall be able to have luncheon with her after all.

CURTAIN.

ACT II.

SCENE I.

Garden at the Embassy, showing the end of a lawn-tennis ground. The tennis ground itself is out of sight where the audience is. Several garden chairs facing the audience. CICELY LAWLESS is sitting on one of the chairs. Enter BYNG dressed in flannels. CICELY pulls round her chair.

BYNG [*lighting a cigarette*]. It's what I thought.

CICELY. What?

BYNG. Your father sent for me this morning and told me that I'd been appointed to Berne.

CICELY. Can't we possibly get him to keep you?

BYNG. It's no use. It's too late. My father's done it, you see. He wrote to your father and asked him to get me moved. He says I've spent money. So I have. I've borrowed and spent right and left. It was great fun while it lasted.

CICELY. It's very tiresome of you. Why don't you try and settle your affairs and get father to keep you on. I'm sure he will if you promise him to turn over a new leaf.

BYNG. What's the use of my making promises which I know I shan't keep? I don't want to turn over a new leaf. I like turning over old leaves.

CICELY. I think you might try once more. After all, you like being here.

BYNG. It's too late. It had to come sooner or later. After all, it might be worse. It might be Rio. In any case I shall be in Europe. I shall have lots of leave. I shall come to London all next summer; perhaps we shall meet there.

CICELY. I think it's a great pity and really quite unnecessary. Of course, I'm sorry—

BYNG. You needn't be sorry for me. I shan't be at Berne more than I can help, and I shall have time to travel and to improve myself.

CICELY. When are you going?

BYNG. To-morrow. I've got very little packing to do. I've pawned all the furniture that belonged to me, and all my clothes that aren't necessary.

CICELY. You are impossible.

BYNG. That's what your father and my father are both always saying. But it isn't true; because after all I exist, and have on the whole a very tolerable existence. Of course, it's a bore going, but—

Enter LADY LAWLESS.

LADY LAWLESS. Well! Where is everybody? [*To* CICELY] My dear child, your frock wants pulling up behind. Come here. [*CICELY walks up to her, LADY LAWLESS straightens the frock, with a jerk.*] There! That's better. [*CICELY walks away and does her best to pull her frock back into its original position.*] Now, what about your guests? Who's coming?

CICELY. I really don't know. I asked Madame San Paolo and Madame Potemkin. Colonel Dartrey said he'd come, and the Careys.

LADY LAWLESS. Let me see you two play a single.

CICELY. Very well.

They go off, R. LADY LAWLESS *sits down.* *Enter* SINGLETON.

LADY LAWLESS. Come and sit here, Mr. Singleton. I want to speak to you.

SINGLETON *sits down next to* LADY LAWLESS.

LADY LAWLESS. You can talk to me for a little till Cicely's guests come.

SINGLETON. Who's coming?

LADY LAWLESS. Madame Potemkin.

SINGLETON. The Russian First Secretary's wife?

LADY LAWLESS. Yes, don't you know her?

SINGLETON. Oh! yes, the American—

LADY LAWLESS. Do you admire her?

SINGLETON. I don't admire Americans.

LADY LAWLESS. And Madame San Paolo? Do you admire her?

SINGLETON. She's not bad-looking. But nothing extraordinary. Nobody would look at her in London.

LADY LAWLESS. I wonder if there is anybody whom you do admire?

SINGLETON. Here?

LADY LAWLESS. Yes.

SINGLETON. I haven't seen anybody worth looking at yet. The women here are all hideous—well dressed, of course, but hideous.

LADY LAWLESS. You're very difficult to please.

SINGLETON. I suppose I am. But when I see a really beautiful woman, I think I know how to admire her.

LADY LAWLESS. But that, of course, is very seldom here.

SINGLETON. Perhaps I have been spoilt.

LADY LAWLESS. In London?

SINGLETON. No, here.

LADY LAWLESS. You just said you didn't admire anyone here.

SINGLETON. None of the natives.

LADY LAWLESS. Mrs. Carey's handsome, isn't she?

SINGLETON. I wasn't thinking of her.

LADY LAWLESS. That's a good stroke.

SINGLETON. You see, when I do admire someone, I can't look at anyone else. Some women put everyone else out, like candles.

LADY LAWLESS. I know they do. It's very disagreeable for the candles, I assure you.

SINGLETON. But it must be very nice for the woman. I often wonder if beautiful women know *how* beautiful they are.

LADY LAWLESS. They know, exactly.

SINGLETON. I don't think they do. They know about their clothes, but they little know the effect they're making. You see, some men never dare say. They never dare speak out. They just worship afar off.

LADY LAWLESS. That's a mistake. Women like to be told things.

SINGLETON. But sometimes it's so difficult.

LADY LAWLESS. I shouldn't have thought you would have found it difficult.

SINGLETON. I do. I know I don't seem shy, but I am. Just now, for instance, when you asked me—

LADY LAWLESS. Look, look. How well they're playing.

SINGLETON [*absently*]. Yes. I mean that one might fall in love with someone who was almost in another sphere. "The desire of the moth," you know. Somebody who would be like the moon in one's heaven. Don't you think everybody has got a moon?

LADY LAWLESS. Perhaps they have.

SINGLETON. And the worst of it is, the moon never guesses, never knows.

LADY LAWLESS. Perhaps she guesses quicker than you think.

SINGLETON. Not in my case. You see—

LADY LAWLESS. That's well played.

SINGLETON. Miss Cicely plays very well.

LADY LAWLESS. So does Mr. Byng. I suppose you've heard he is going to be moved?

SINGLETON. No. Where to?

LADY LAWLESS. Berne.

SINGLETON. Poor chap.

LADY LAWLESS. Yes, I'm very sorry, but, you see, he was hopeless. I'm afraid he was a little bit in love with Cicely. Mercifully, she doesn't care for him.

SINGLETON. Doesn't she? I thought she did.

LADY LAWLESS. No, Cicely was never the least bit in love with him.

It's a comfort it isn't Mr. Byng, because that was out of the question for many reasons. Girls are so cold-blooded nowadays. In my day it was different.

SINGLETON. Perhaps she's in love with someone else.

LADY LAWLESS. I don't think so ; but she's secretive.

SINGLETON. I think she'd be difficult to please.

LADY LAWLESS. She'll have to give up all that nonsense if she wants to get married. She hasn't got a farthing. Besides, I believe she'd marry almost anyone just to get rid of me. She hates me and she loathes diplomatic life. I'm sure I can't help it. It's not my fault I'm a step-mother and an ambassadress. However, let's hope she'll have a nice mother-in-law.

SINGLETON. That's a good stroke.

LADY LAWLESS. I'm sorry for the girl, but she might look at the matter from my point of view. I do everything I can for her, and it's not very amusing for me to drag her about to balls. You've no idea how lonely one feels sometimes in a place like this. You see, I have no friends here.

SINGLETON. Girls are so thoughtless.

LADY LAWLESS. I haven't made a new friend for years.

SINGLETON. I suppose it is difficult for you here.

LADY LAWLESS. I wasn't thinking of that. I meant altogether—

SINGLETON. I wonder who'll be sent here instead of Byng.

LADY LAWLESS. I don't know. I do hope it will be somebody who'll be nice and kind and not too proud to come and talk to me sometimes. I'm always so afraid of asking any of you, because I know you've got much better things to do.

SINGLETON. In the Chancery, Napier's always saying you are the best company in the world.

LADY LAWLESS. How nice of him. But when I was talking of friends I meant a real friend—someone who would understand. I had quite given up hopes of ever making a friend like that again—

but curiously enough, not long ago, I thought it might perhaps be going to happen. But perhaps I was mistaken.

SINGLETON. It's so easy to make mistakes ; but much easier for men than for women—women always know. Now in my case, Lady Lawless, what would you advise—would you advise me to speak out ?

LADY LAWLESS. Certainly.

SINGLETON. You see I can afford to marry.

LADY LAWLESS. Oh ! yes, I suppose you can. [*Laughing.*] You know, it's very funny, but I never thought you were dreaming of marriage.

Enter FOOTMAN, L.

FOOTMAN. Miss Wilson is here and would like to speak to your Ladyship.

LADY LAWLESS. Very well. [*FOOTMAN goes out.*] They've come to rehearse. Thank you, Mr. Singleton. You've interested me a good deal.

SINGLETON. Of course, that's all between ourselves.

LADY LAWLESS. Of course.

She goes out. Enter WHITE in flannels, L.

WHITE. Swayne and I have been watching you and Lady Lawless. My word, you were going it.

SINGLETON. Was anybody else there ?

WHITE. No.

SINGLETON. That's all right. I don't want to get ourselves talked about.

WHITE. You don't suppose we haven't all noticed it.

SINGLETON. Well, you're all wrong, as a matter of fact. Lady Lawless and I are great friends. But she's merely helping me in quite another business.

WHITE. Oh ! I see, a blind.

SINGLETON. No, not exactly.

WHITE. Who is it ?

SINGLETON. Wouldn't you like to know?

WHITE. I know who it is. It's that Austrian girl.

SINGLETON. No, thank you. Of course, I enjoy talking to the chefesse, she's so sensible.

WHITE. Besides being the best looking woman here.

SINGLETON. With one exception.

WHITE. Who's that?

SINGLETON. Wait till it's announced.

Enter BYNG, R.

SWAYNE. Byng, I've made a discovery. Singleton's been fooling us. He's really in love with a girl.

SINGLETON. Rot!

BYNG. Will it mean another subscription to a wedding present?

SINGLETON. He's only rotting.

BYNG. Will you come and make a four?

SINGLETON. All right.

SINGLETON, BYNG *and* WHITE *go out*, R. *Enter* MADAME SAN PAOLO *and* MRS. CAREY, R. MRS. CAREY *is a handsome but rather commonplace woman, about 35. She is dressed for tennis.*

MADAME SAN PAOLO. I must go and say how-de-do to Cicely.

SINGLETON *and* CICELY *walk in*, L.

CICELY. How nice of you to come.

SINGLETON. Won't you play, Mrs. Carey?

MRS. CAREY. Certainly. But you've four without me.

SINGLETON. I've been playing, and I like looking on. I'll score.

MRS. CAREY. I'll play one set with pleasure.

SINGLETON. Does Lady Lawless know you're here?

MRS. CAREY. Yes, she knows, and she says the Ambassador's just coming. Lady Lawless is with the actors, they're rehearsing. She'll be back as soon as she can.

CICELY. I think I'll have a rest.

MADAME SAN PAOLO. No, please go on playing. I love watching.
CICELY. Very well.

CICELY, MRS. CAREY *and* SINGLETON *go to the lawn tennis ground.* MADAME SAN PAOLO *sits down.* *Enter* SIR HEDWORTH, R., *about 47, slightly grey, square, determined face, melancholy eyes, upright, rather pale, dressed in a frock-coat.*

SIR HEDWORTH. How do you do?

MADAME SAN PAOLO. I got your note. This evening's hopeless for me. You see, Carlo starts for Italy to-morrow morning. And then all these last days his nerves have been on edge. It frightens me. I don't know what he thinks—what he suspects. He said he would be in at five. He thinks I'm doing things at shops. But I feel he'll look in here this afternoon.

SIR HEDWORTH. Then I shan't see you again?

MADAME SAN PAOLO. Except to-night.

SIR HEDWORTH. That won't count.

MADAME SAN PAOLO. I shall be back in three weeks, and then I shall stay straight on, unless—

SIR HEDWORTH. What?

MADAME SAN PAOLO. I'm so terribly afraid of Carlo making me go with him straight to America.

SIR HEDWORTH. Has he said anything about it?

MADAME SAN PAOLO. No, but he's been so odd lately. However, it's no good thinking about that. I want to tell you something quickly before they come. You must leave this place now for a little and go to some quiet place and get quite well.

SIR HEDWORTH. I don't mind going away for three weeks. It won't make any difference. When shall you sail for America?

MADAME SAN PAOLO. In any case not for six months, and I shall try and stay on as long as possible.

SIR HEDWORTH. Once you're gone it will be all over with me. You

don't suppose I care a rap for this damned Embassy? I can see the doctors think I'm dying. But as they're nearly always wrong I shall probably get well.

MADAME SAN PAOLO. Don't talk like that.

SIR HEDWORTH. That's what's sure to happen; in six months time I shall be quite well.

Enter FOOTMAN, L.

FOOTMAN. The carriage is at the door, your Excellency.

He goes out.

SIR HEDWORTH [*looking at his watch*]. I've got to go to the Ministry. I shall be back as soon as I can, but if you're gone—till to-night. [*He shakes hands with her.*]

MADAME SAN PAOLO. Good-bye.

SIR HEDWORTH *goes out, L.* MRS. CAREY *strolls up from the lawn tennis ground and sits down next to MADAME SAN PAOLO.*

MRS. CAREY. I've asked Mr. Singleton to play instead of me. I'm so glad you've come. We're not dining to-night, we're only asked after the dinner, for the acting, and I was afraid I shouldn't have a word with you before you went, because we're off to London to-morrow morning.

MADAME SAN PAOLO. Oh! really?

MRS. CAREY. Yes, on leave at last. I suppose we may smoke?

MADAME SAN PAOLO. I'm sure. Would you like a cigarette?

MRS. CAREY. Thank you, I always smoke my own. We always get our cigarettes from Petersburg.

MADAME SAN PAOLO. Yes?

MRS. CAREY. Dear Petersburg. I wish we were back there.

MADAME SAN PAOLO. Did you like it better than this?

MRS. CAREY. I should think so! I can't bear this place. It's so *petite ville*, and one never can get to know the people, can one? In Petersburg we had quantities of friends. People were so kind; and

the dear Grand Duchess loved to do anything in the world for us. Here everything is so stiff, and then Lady Lawless really does so very little—she's no help.

MADAME SAN PAOLO. But Sir Hedworth hasn't been well.

MRS. CAREY. Oh! he's dying. And Lady Lawless doesn't see it. Isn't it odd? I don't believe she cares a bit.

MADAME SAN PAOLO. I think he looks so much better to-day.

MRS. CAREY. He may be better one day and worse the next, but his career is over. The doctors are certain to send him to some quiet place. I wonder who will be sent here instead of him. Somebody who'll take a little more trouble, I do hope. You see, Lady Lawless has had no experience of the service. She doesn't know what is expected of an ambassadress. She never calls on any of her colleagues. She never goes to anyone's day; and she won't have a day of her own. People don't understand that.

MADAME SAN PAOLO. I thought she was always in after six.

MRS. CAREY. She says so, but when one calls she never is at home. They hardly ever even ask the staff to dinner. When we were at Petersburg we used to dine at the Embassy constantly. One felt at home there.

MADAME SAN PAOLO. Are you going away for long?

MRS. CAREY. It depends on the Ambassador's plans. If he goes away we shall probably have to come back, although we've scarcely had any leave this year. But I doubt if Lady Lawless will let him go away. She's so selfish.

MADAME SAN PAOLO. Are you going to London?

MRS. CAREY. We're going on a round of visits. First we're going to the Froshams in Norfolk—John is Lord Frosham's second cousin; and then we shall go to Yorkshire for the Doncaster races, and possibly end up with Scotland.

MADAME SAN PAOLO. You are fond of sports?

MRS. CAREY. I like real racing. Of course, here it isn't racing at

all. I used to hunt in England as a girl. But John doesn't care for hunting—he likes shooting and golf, and we shall get a lot of that.

MADAME SAN PAOLO. You've never been to America.

MRS. CAREY. Heaven forbid. I can't bear Americans. I think they're all so common.

MADAME SAN PAOLO. Then I'm afraid we shan't meet there.

MRS. CAREY. They ought to give John an Embassy, but it will be just like them not to. There's Madame Potemkin coming. I shall go back and play.

MRS. CAREY *goes out.* Enter MADAME POTEMKIN, an American, about 30, kindly face, quietly dressed.

MADAME POTEMKIN. I'm so sorry you're going away. We shall miss you quite dreadfully.

MADAME SAN PAOLO. And *we* shall miss *you*.

MADAME POTEMKIN. It's always like that in diplomacy, isn't it? Just as one makes friends with someone, one is sent to the other end of the world.

MADAME SAN PAOLO. Washington is just the place you can't be sent to, isn't it? But you like this place, don't you?

MADAME POTEMKIN. Oh! yes, very much, but I feel we shall be moved soon.

MADAME SAN PAOLO. It's a horrible life, isn't it?

MADAME POTEMKIN. Horrible. One wastes all one's best time. During the first five years we were in the service I never once had a talk with a human being as I'm talking with you now. I mean someone whom one could talk over things with.

MADAME SAN PAOLO. I often wonder why men become diplomats.

MADAME POTEMKIN. So do I. Do you know I really ought to go.

MADAME SAN PAOLO. So ought I—but I do want to see Cicely a moment.

MADAME POTEMKIN. Let's call her. [*Going R.*] Cicely!

Enter CICELY.

MADAME POTEMKIN. I must go, and Madame San Paolo wants to see you. Good-bye, my dear.

MADAME POTEMKIN *goes out*.

CICELY. Good-bye. [*To MADAME SAN PAOLO*] I've asked Mr. Singleton to play instead of me. I must talk to you for a minute.

MADAME SAN PAOLO. I ought to go home, but I did want to say good-bye to you. I think your father's better; but oughtn't he to go away?

CICELY. Of course he ought. But it's so difficult to make him. And then my stepmother didn't seem very anxious.

MADAME SAN PAOLO. You must make him go away as soon as you can.

CICELY. I'll do my best.

MADAME SAN PAOLO. Mr. Napier's come back.

CICELY. Yes. That's a comfort.

MADAME SAN PAOLO. Do you like the new secretary any better now?

CICELY. No, I dislike him more and more. What's so irritating is, that just because my stepmother was rather nice to him, he imagines she's in love with him. And he just makes up to her out of snobbishness; and she doesn't see it. She will some day though.

MADAME SAN PAOLO. I know. Here's my husband.

Enter SAN PAOLO: an Italian, about 40, commonplace looking. He shakes hands with CICELY.

SAN PAOLO. How are you? Playing tennis hard? [*To MADAME SAN PAOLO*] I thought I might perhaps find you here. I met Madame Von Lagenburg and she wants to see you. I told her you would be in at five, whatever happened.

MADAME SAN PAOLO. Yes, I must go home at once. Good-bye, Cicely. I shall see you again to-night.

SAN PAOLO. Ah! there are the Ambassador and Mr. Mervyn. Good-bye.

CICELY. Good-bye.

SAN PAOLO and MADAME SAN PAOLO *go out. Enter MERVYN.*

MERVYN. They want Byng in the Chancery.

CICELY. He's over there.

MERVYN [*shouts*]. Byng! [*To CICELY*] the Ambassador's going to telegraph.

Enter BYNG, SINGLETON and MRS. CAREY.

MERVYN [*to BYNG*]. Swayne says you're to come to the Chancery at once. The Ambassador's going to telegraph.

MRS. CAREY. Well, I shall go and have tea.

CICELY. I don't think I want any tea. It's too hot. [*She sits down.*]

MERVYN. Come on, Byng.

BYNG. There's no hurry. [*To SINGLETON*] I suppose you're coming too, aren't you?

SINGLETON. Presently. It's no good there being more than two people for one telegram.

BYNG. You're not coming?

SINGLETON. No.

BYNG *goes out sulkily.* MRS. CAREY and MERVYN *also.*

CICELY. I think I shall go and have tea too.

SINGLETON. Oh! wait a moment, Miss Lawless. Let's wait till the bores go. The Consul's wife is over there.

CICELY. Oh!

SINGLETON [*sitting down and lighting a cigarette*]. Jolly out here, isn't it?

CICELY [*very coldly*]. Delightful.

SINGLETON. Byng thinks he can play tennis, but he can't.

CICELY. Oh! really.

SINGLETON. But you're the best of all of us, by far, Miss Lawless.

CICELY. I can't play a bit.

SINGLETON. I've never seen anybody play like you. I could watch you playing for ever.

CICELY [*absent-mindedly*]. I like playing.

SINGLETON. So do I when I'm playing with you. I don't know which I like best, playing with you or watching you.

CICELY [*absent-mindedly, not listening*]. No.

SINGLETON. You know, when I first came here, I felt miserable. I was in an awful funk of everybody here, but especially of your father and of Lady Lawless. But directly I saw you I knew it would be all right. I felt we should be friends.

CICELY [*still not listening: she is thinking about something else*]. Yes.

SINGLETON. Yes, I knew we should be friends, and then I began to hope we might be great friends. You see, you are different from anyone else I've ever seen. You are in another sphere. But all the same, perhaps one has the right to speak. Of course, I know it's the "desire of the moth for the star," and all that sort of thing, but I can't help it, I must tell you, Miss Cicely. May I call you Miss Cicely? May I call you Cicely?

CICELY [*suddenly waking up and understanding. She gets up white with passion*]. How dare you speak to me like that? You, you of all people! Mr. Singleton, do you think that I would ever stay in the same room with you, if I wasn't obliged to here—if you and I weren't at this Embassy? I have to put up with you here, just as one has to put up with the Government furniture, and if you want to know what I think of you, it's this. You're part of a nightmare to me—you don't matter more than the rest—but I should like to wake up and find that it doesn't exist. Please, for heaven's sake, remember that. [*She walks out.*]

CURTAIN.

ACT II.

SCENE II.

The Chancery of H.M. Embassy. Doors, R.C., L.C. Three writing tables along the back wall where the doors are. A desk in the middle. Three writing tables along the footlights side of the room, projecting from the wall: Fireplace, armchairs, L., table, cupboards, R. and L., of the fireplace. SWAYNE, SINGLETON and BYNG are sitting at the further tables. WHITE and MERVYN and LEE-ROBERTS at the nearer tables. SWAYNE is writing. SINGLETON and BYNG are typewriting. MERVYN is doing nothing and LEE-ROBERTS is writing. They typewrite and work in silence for a moment or two. Enter NAPIER, with his hat on.

NAPIER. Has that telegram gone?

WHITE. Long ago.

LEE-ROBERTS. I suppose we can go now. There won't be anything else.

NAPIER [*excitedly*]. No, you can't go. There may be a hundred more telegrams. I've just seen the Ambassador. He's not at all certain what he's going to do. He may be going to telegraph about all sorts of things. When there's a crisis going on like this, one never knows what mayn't happen. He may have to have a special messenger.

LEE-ROBERTS. I thought that was all over. The Ambassador said it was at lunch. I've been here the whole afternoon, and I've had exactly five minutes work.

NAPIER. In diplomacy you're not paid for working. You're paid for hanging about in case there may be work.

SWAYNE. And when I came in and the Ambassador sent down the telegram, of course, as usual, there was no one there.

MERVYN. I beg your pardon, I was here.

SWAYNE. One's not enough, and besides, you don't count—you're honorary. There ought always to be at least three scrubs here.

SINGLETON. We were in the garden. I left a message with Williams.

BYNG. Are you dining at the Embassy?

NAPIER. Yes, I didn't much want to, but I've got to. Lady Lawless has got a play, and I do so hate plays after dinner in the house.

BYNG. Shall you have dinner before or afterwards?

NAPIER. What do you mean?

BYNG. Well, I don't suppose you can eat the Embassy food, can you?

WHITE. It's Lady Lawless's fault. The Chief curses every day about it, and she simply won't get a new cook, because this one was with them in Madrid. He's an half-bred Italian, an awful scoundrel.

BYNG. That's just it. They're afraid to get rid of him. He threatened to murder the kitchenmaids if he was sent away.

SINGLETON. I don't care what the food's like as long as the wine is good. His Excellency's port is worth drinking; '58, my boy; and what about his old brandy?

WHITE. Yes, I advise you to have a good go at that.

SWAYNE. The only place to get good wine now is Hamburg. However, I only drink claret. I never touch fizz.

MERVYN. Dartrey says he's got some ripping claret.

SWAYNE. That! Poison, my dear boy, poison. Wilson sold it him when he went away. Don't you ever touch it.

NAPIER [*looking in the basket*]. Have all these things been signed?

WHITE. Yes. But look here, Napier. Do you think this can go up to the Chief? [*He takes out a typewritten despatch from another basket and gives it to him.*]

NAPIER [*looks through it*]. Well, it's got a great many corrections, hasn't it? Who did it?

LEE-ROBERTS. I did it, and it took me nearly two hours yesterday.

NAPIER. Well, I don't know. Send it up, but don't blame me if the Ambassador has it done again.

LEE-ROBERTS. I can't typewrite on a Remington. Can't we get the F.O. to let us have an Oliver?

NAPIER. You must learn to use a Remington. By the way, the Ambassador wants Williams to go to the station to-morrow evening; I'd better see him about it.

WHITE. He's gone out. Dartrey's sent him somewhere.

SWAYNE. Yes, Bertie, and I wish you'd ask the military and naval attachés sometimes to send their own servants, and not always to send the Chancery servant out just when we're busy.

Telephone bell on the wall sounds.

SINGLETON [*taking off the receiver*]. Yes, sir; all right, sir. It's the Chief. He says he wants to see you [*to WHITE*].

WHITE. Damn. [*He rushes out of the room.*]

MERVYN. I say, Bertie, can I go?

NAPIER. Yes.

MERVYN goes out.

NAPIER [*to BYNG*]. So you're going to Berne.

BYNG. Yes.

NAPIER. I didn't have anything to do with it.

BYNG. I know.

SWAYNE. And you may think yourself lucky, young man, I can tell you. No work. Plenty of leave.

BYNG. Do you think they'll give me an extra hundred a year if I learn the language?

NAPIER. What, Swiss?

BYNG. It's very difficult to talk good Swiss.

LEE-ROBERTS. How does one end up to the Minister of Fine Arts.

SWAYNE. What's the good of our having a French scholar here if he doesn't know that?

SINGLETON. "Très haute considération."

SWAYNE. Certainly not. "Haute considération"-s enough.

BYNG. Put "votre vraiment." The Ambassador hates affected French.

LEE-ROBERTS. Bar rot: "Haute considération"?

NAPIER. No, "Considération très distinguée."

LEE-ROBERTS. Is automobile masculine or feminine?

BYNG. Both.

SINGLETON. Masculine.

BYNG. Feminine.

SINGLETON. I know it's masculine.

BYNG. I bet you a sovereign it's feminine.

LEE-ROBERTS. Which is it, Napier?

NAPIER. I don't know.

BYNG. I know it's feminine.

SWAYNE. Supposing someone looks it out in the dictionary.

LEE-ROBERTS. It's not in my dictionary.

SWAYNE. Put motor-car instead.

Enter WHITE.

WHITE. The Chief wants to know who asked for facilities for a man called Wilcox to inspect anti-snake bite poison.

LEE-ROBERTS. We did it in the Chancery.

WHITE. Yes, but *who* did it?

LEE-ROBERTS. I think I did.

WHITE. The Ambassador wants to know why he wasn't told. The man has written to him direct for something else.

NAPIER. Is he going to telegraph?

WHITE. He's not sure. He's waiting to see the Russian Minister.

NAPIER. Well, I must go and write my letters.

NAPIER goes out.

WHITE [*to LEE-ROBERTS*]. I say, I wish you'd tell one when you're going to do that kind of thing.

LEE-ROBERTS. The man came here himself ; he was in a hurry.

WHITE [*excited*]. You might know by this time that those things are never done like that, and in any case you ought to have asked.

LEE-ROBERTS. All right, old chap, keep your hair on.

SWAYNE *walks out*, R.

WHITE [*excitedly*]. It's all very well, but it's we who get the blame. We're supposed to look after you scrubs. I wish to goodness the F.O. would send us at least one clerk who's got the smallest idea of the work ; you none of you can write a decent draft ; you give people facilities without saying anything about it. You're never there when the bag comes.

LEE-ROBERTS. Well, you needn't talk about drafts.

WHITE. I don't pretend to be able to write well. I'm not an author ; but at least I see that the things are sent to the right people and begin and end right.

BYNG. I say, White, is automobile masculine or feminine ?

WHITE. It can be either.

BYNG. There, you see—

SINGLETON. You said it was feminine.

BYNG. So it is. You owe me a sovereign.

SINGLETON. I'm damned if I do.

WHITE [*to LEE-ROBERTS*]. Have you finished that thing for the Ministry of Fine Arts.

LEE-ROBERTS. Yes, ages ago.

WHITE. Lets have a look at it.

LEE-ROBERTS. Why ? It's not *your* business.

WHITE. It *is* my business.

LEE-ROBERTS. I haven't got it. Napier's got it.

WHITE. I don't believe he has.

LEE-ROBERTS. All right. I'm a liar.

Telephone sounds.

WHITE. There's the Chief.

SINGLETON [*taking off the receiver*]. Yes sir. . . . All right, sir. The Ambassador's not going to telegraph.

WHITE. That's all right. I say, you fellows, mind you lock up the Chancery, and don't leave everything out as you usually do.

LEE-ROBERTS. And don't take the cyphers home with you.

WHITE [*walking up to LEE-ROBERTS, smiling*]. Are you dining with the Chief?

LEE-ROBERTS. No.

WHITE. Well, let's have dinner somewhere.

LEE-ROBERTS. Right you are. Come and fetch me just before eight.

Enter SWAYNE.

WHITE. The Ambassador isn't going to telegraph.

SWAYNE. Then I'm off.

WHITE. Come on. We must tell Bertie.

WHITE and SWAYNE go out. LEE-ROBERTS puts the baskets in the cupboards and locks them.

SINGLETON [*to BYNG*]. What time's dinner?

BYNG [*who is writing a letter and doesn't look up*]. Eight-fifteen.

SINGLETON [*getting up*]. I thought it was at eight. Napier said it was eight.

BYNG. Then go at eight.

LEE-ROBERTS. I'm upstairs if anybody wants anything.

He goes out.

SINGLETON. You see, I was right about that word.

BYNG [*not paying any attention*]. Really?

SINGLETON. Yes, I knew I was right. Of course, automobile's masculine.

BYNG. Well, if you really want to know, the Academy settled that it should be feminine.

SINGLETON. Of course, we all know that you think yourself a devilish good French scholar.

BYNG. At any rate, I don't make a noise like a hoarse parrot when I say a word with an *r* in it.

SINGLETON. You think that's funny, don't you? I suppose you say you don't fancy yourself at French?

BYNG. Yes, almost as much as you do at lawn-tennis.

SINGLETON. Well, I can hit the ball over the net.

BYNG. Aren't you going to play against the champion?

SINGLETON. I shouldn't waste all your beautiful sarcasm in the Chancery, keep it for to-night.

BYNG. Next time we play and you're umpire, I'll thank you not to give all my strokes out, when they're not out.

SINGLETON. I like that, I'll ask Miss Cicely to-night if that's true.

BYNG. All right, we'll ask her.

SINGLETON. I suppose you think she'll say anything to please you.

BYNG. On the contrary, I think you've impressed her enormously.

SINGLETON. We had quite a nice talk after you went away. She thinks it's a pity you don't learn to play tennis.

BYNG. Really.

SINGLETON. She said she supposed you were too lazy. She doesn't like lazy men she said—men who lie in bed till eleven o'clock in the morning.

BYNG. Did she tell you anything else?

SINGLETON. Nothing particular, except that she was sorry they'd had to get you moved.

BYNG. Oh! She said they'd got me moved, did she?

SINGLETON. Yes, she said she wondered it hadn't happened before.

BYNG. She seems to have had time to tell you a good deal.

SINGLETON. We had a good talk.

BYNG. Ha-ha.

SINGLETON. I suppose you don't believe it.

BYNG. Hee-hee.

SINGLETON. Well, one can't expect much from a chap who loses a bet and then asks to be paid.

BYNG. I think I said, if you remember, that automobile was feminine, and you said it was masculine.

SINGLETON. I said it could be either.

BYNG. You said it was masculine.

SINGLETON. You bet it was feminine, and it turns out to be masculine too, and then you asked me to pay up.

BYNG. And you said it was both?

SINGLETON. I may have said "common."

BYNG. My God! You're a liar!

SINGLETON. Thanks.

BYNG. You've been lying the whole afternoon. Every word you said about Miss Lawless was a lie. She simply can't stand the sight of you.

SINGLETON. I suppose she told you that.

BYNG. It doesn't need much telling.

SINGLETON. You ought to have heard what she said about you.

BYNG. Liar.

SINGLETON. And you're a cheat—you cheat at tennis—you tried to swindle over that bet.

BYNG. Get out.

SINGLETON. I'm damned if I do.

BYNG. Then I'll make you.

BYNG flies at SINGLETON, they wrestle and fall on the

floor. They knock over the table and make a good deal of noise. They half get up and roll over again. SINGLETON tears off BYNG's collar. BYNG tears SINGLETON's waistcoat. Enter SIR HEDWORTH. He looks at them in blank astonishment. As soon as they notice him they separate and get up shamefacedly.

BYNG [*panting*]. We were trying ju-jitsu, sir.

CURTAIN.

ACT III.

SCENE I.

Drawing room in the Embassy. A high room, walls covered with silk, with two large windows in the back reaching down to the ground. Fireplace, R. Door beyond the fireplace leading into another drawing room. Door, L., near the stage, leading into anteroom. A lot of gilt cane chairs are scattered about. NAPIER is looking for something. Enter MRS. HYDE.

MRS. HYDE. Can't you find it, Bertie?

NAPIER. No, I've looked everywhere.

MRS. HYDE [*leading him down stage and talking low*]. You can't find it because it isn't there to find. I wanted to speak to you for a minute, so I invented a cigarette case and special cigarettes. I don't know what you're feeling, but I feel as if we were dancing on a volcano, and it makes me so nervous that I don't know what to do. Did you ever see anything like San Paolo?

NAPIER. Yes, it's frightening. Dinner was bad enough, but this is worse.

MRS. HYDE. He's mad with jealousy. I'm so terrified of there suddenly being a scene.

NAPIER. She looks upset, too.

MRS. HYDE. She is. I expect they had a row on the way here. My dear, when I shook hands with him his hands were like ice, and he was trembling.

POTEMKIN [*coming to the door, R.*]. Mrs. Hyde, the Ambassador's dealt.

MRS. HYDE. I'm coming at once. I can't find my cigarette case, but it doesn't matter.

She goes with POTEMKIN into the other room, R. LADY LAWLESS and SINGLETON come in, L., carrying a Chinese screen.

LADY LAWLESS. I want to put this screen over there, next to the door.

They carry it to the door, R.

You see, the actors can come in through that room now without being seen by the audience. They like that.

SINGLETON. Who's the play by, Lady Lawless?

LADY LAWLESS. I don't know—some poet-friend of Eleonora Wilson's.

SINGLETON. Oh, it's in verse!

LADY LAWLESS. Now we must arrange the chairs—no, it's in prose. I won't have any more poetry-plays in this house; the last time I had a play in verse here, thinking that as it was poetry it must be all right, it made my hair stand on end.

SINGLETON. But that was in French, wasn't it?

LADY LAWLESS. Yes, old French, too; but oh! so, so easy to understand. I think we must put these chairs a little further back.

SINGLETON. But didn't you read the play beforehand?

LADY LAWLESS. No. I took it on trust because it was recommended by Madame Saintange. I didn't know she'd got such a large mind.

SINGLETON. It's a pity you didn't read it; you're such a wonderful judge of poetry. I suppose some people are born with a poetic soul.

LADY LAWLESS. It's no good talking to me like that, Mr. Singleton; I've found you out. I like you, Mr. Singleton—I can't help it—and I shall go on liking you; but I've found you out. Now, don't pretend

to be stupid, because you're not stupid, and you're what the French call an *arriviste*. And you're a humbug—a nice humbug; only with me it's no use any more.

SINGLETON. But, Lady Lawless—

LADY LAWLESS. Don't. It's no use. I'm not one of those women who never make mistakes about men. I often make mistakes. I like attention. I like being flattered. I can't have too much flattery. I know it's all nonsense, but it puts me in a good temper. I hate home-truths, rough diamonds and all that—people who are sincere every day and all day, you know. Only I like the game to be well played. I don't like being turned out of my fool's paradise by Adam himself! I'm very easy to take in—until I find people out. Sometimes it lasts a long time, but when it's done, well, it's done—that's all. I thought I'd better tell you. It's undignified, I suppose.

SINGLETON. You couldn't be undignified.

LADY LAWLESS. You're beginning again! Well, I'm nothing if not undignified. That's my point. Some women are brilliant, some are political, some are sporting, I'm undignified. That's what makes me original as an ambassadress. But we shall go on being good friends—only, no more humbug, please. You must begin all that again with someone else. Do you see? Now I think these chairs will do.

Enter MERVYN, R.

MERVYN. It's a new rubber—will you play instead of me?

SINGLETON. Certainly; you don't want anything more, do you, Lady Lawless?

LADY LAWLESS. No, thank you, Mr. Singleton. Wait one minute. Is Mr. Napier playing, Mr. Mervyn?

MERVYN. No, he's looking on, and advising Madame Potemkin.

LADY LAWLESS. Then please ask him to come here a minute. I want his advice.

MERVYN. Yes, Lady Lawless.

MERVYN and SINGLETON go out, R. *Enter NAPIER, R.*

LADY LAWLESS [*moving a chair*]. There. Do you think this arrangement will do?

NAPIER. I think it's perfect.

LADY LAWLESS. Do you think those screens make a good enough stage for them?

NAPIER. Quite enough.

LADY LAWLESS. You see, it gives them plenty of room, and as it's a Chinese play—

NAPIER. Oh! it's Chinese—

LADY LAWLESS. Not by a Chinaman. I shouldn't risk that; but it's supposed to happen in China. I told Hedworth I'd read it, but I haven't. I didn't have time, and they wouldn't let me see the rehearsal. But don't give me away. It's only to take a few minutes, but I'm rather nervous all the same. The last time—it was so dreadfully improper, I didn't know where to look. But I suppose this must be all right. Eleonora Wilson is an American, and Americans are always proper, aren't they?

NAPIER. Yes, except—

LADY LAWLESS. Now, for heaven's sake, don't frighten me. However, it doesn't much matter, does it? We're all grown up, and if it is vulgar it won't kill us. I suppose they'll be ages getting ready. They've only just come. Have you got two bridge tables in there?

NAPIER. Yes.

Enter SINGLETON, R.

SINGLETON [*to NAPIER*]. Miss Lawless wants to know if you would like to play instead of her. She's had enough, she wants to go out. If you don't want to, Mervyn can.

NAPIER. I should like to play very much, unless you want me, Lady Lawless.

LADY LAWLESS. No, if you approve of the arrangement. That's all I want.

NAPIER. I think it's perfect.

LADY LAWLESS. I'm going to see whether the actors want anything.

She goes out, L. NAPIER goes into the other room, R., followed by SINGLETON. Enter CICELY and BYNG, R.

CICELY. Thank heavens, that's over. Let's sit down here.

They sit down.

BYNG. You don't like bridge?

CICELY. It depends who I'm playing with.

BYNG. Don't you like Madame Potemkin and San Paolo?

CICELY. Oh! yes, but Mr. Singleton was my partner.

BYNG. Oh!

CICELY. I don't mind telling you that I can't bear him.

BYNG. Really! He doesn't seem to be aware of it.

CICELY. He ought to be, if he hasn't got the hide of a rhinoceros.

BYNG. He said he'd had a long talk with you this afternoon.

CICELY. Yes, I told him what I thought of him. I'm afraid I was too violent.

BYNG. You needn't worry, you didn't ruffle his self-conceit. I heard him saying at dinner that the best friendships often begin with prejudice and even dislike on one side.

CICELY. Don't let's talk about him. Are you really going to-morrow?

BYNG. Yes.

CICELY. I'm so miserable about it.

BYNG. So am I. It had to happen sooner or later; only when it does happen it's horrible.

CICELY. Yes, isn't it? What shall I do without you?

BYNG. I shan't forget.

CICELY. No, don't quite; and write sometimes—just a line.

BYNG. Don't forget me altogether. There's not much in me worth remembering, only if there is anything you're the only person who has ever found it out, the only person who ever made me wish to be different.

CICELY. I'm fond of you, just as you are of me.

BYNG. Knowing you has made a great difference in my life.

CICELY. You know, the only time I've been happy since I've been here has been when I've been talking to you.

BYNG. I could say heaps more; but what's the use? I'm going away. I shan't probably see you again for a long time—perhaps never again like this. When we meet again everything will be different. Well, if things had been different, everything might have been different. You know, don't you?

CICELY. Dear, dear Bobby. Yes, of course I know.

BYNG. I want to say good-bye now. I shan't see you again properly. Good-bye, darling Cicely.

He takes her hand and kisses it. She takes his head in her hands and kisses him. Enter SINGLETON, R.

SINGLETON. Do you know where Lady Lawless is?

BYNG. No.

SINGLETON. Oh! The Ambassador is asking for her.

Enter LADY LAWLESS, L.

LADY LAWLESS. They're quite ready. Mr. Singleton, will you tell them and ask them to come in? I'm going to take the actors round the other way so that they can come in at the other door; but I want everybody to come in first. They can go on with their bridge afterwards if they like.

SINGLETON. Yes, Lady Lawless.

He goes out, R.

LADY LAWLESS. I don't know if it's a play for you, Cicely.

BYNG. Eleonora Wilson is quite safe.

Enter R. MADAME POTEMKIN, MRS. HYDE, MADAME SAN PAOLO, MERVYN, NAPIER, POTEMKIN, SAN PAOLO, and SIR HEDWORTH.

LADY LAWLESS [*to BYNG*]. Just arrange them, will you? I'm going to fetch the actors.

She goes out, L.

SIR HEDWORTH [*to MADAME POTEMKIN*]. Will you sit there? [*To MADAME SAN PAOLO*] And you there. [*To the others*] Will you all sit down where you like?

MRS. HYDE. We must leave a place for Lady Lawless.

They all sit down. SAN PAOLO stands up in front of the fireplace, R.

BYNG [*to SAN PAOLO*]. Won't you sit down?

SAN PAOLO. Thank you, I like standing.

The AMBASSADOR sits in the front row between MADAME POTEMKIN and MADAME SAN PAOLO, next to her sits POTEMKIN, then a place is left for LADY LAWLESS. The others sit in the next row. Enter LADY LAWLESS, R. She walks from behind the screen into the audience.

LADY LAWLESS. The play is called "The Oath." We haven't got programmes. There are three characters. The Emperor, who is disguised as a minstrel, the Princess, and her husband, the Prince. The action happens in the Prince's house, in the impossible days and in an impossible country.

The EMPEROR and the PRINCESS walk on to the stage; the EMPEROR disguised as a minstrel.

THE PRINCESS. Go away, I entreat you, lest you bring upon us an evil too great for grief.

THE EMPEROR. There is no evil to fear. He is in the palace, keeping guard over the Emperor, and the Emperor needs no guard, for he is guarded here by the walls of your soft arms and the light of your bright eyes. He cannot be relieved of his guard until sunrise.

THE PRINCESS. Ah! What has come to you? Begone before he comes, and bring not evil upon yourself and upon me. Already it is day. Do you not see the daylight creeping through the blind?

.

THE EMPEROR. It is the first shiver of the dawn.

THE PRINCESS. I hear the potter whistling on the way to his work.

THE EMPEROR. All day long in the palace I live not, but die.
Will you banish me to the grave?

THE PRINCESS. I entreat you to go. The watchman has gone to rest and the lark sings instead. If he should come, it is death to me as well as to him.

THE EMPEROR. It is well. I go. To-morrow morning there will be no longer need for so swift a parting.

THE PRINCESS. To-morrow, why?

THE EMPEROR. I dreamed a dream that to-morrow the wall that is between us will be broken down, and that fortune will bind us together with a golden thread.

THE PRINCESS. See, the first ray of the sun strikes the blind. Go!

THE EMPEROR. Farewell, flower of the world, until to-night.

He goes out. The PRINCESS takes a lute and stands looking at the window. As she looks she touches the strings and sings:—

I entreat thee, begone, arise;

Dost thou not see

The daylight in the skies?

Ah! what has come to thee?

While she is singing the PRINCE enters stealthily behind her.

He stands looking at her. She repeats the last words:—

Ah! what has come to thee?

THE PRINCE. Ah! what has come to thee?

She starts and looks round.

THE PRINCESS. My lord!

THE PRINCE. Why do you shiver?

THE PRINCESS. The breath of the dawn steals through the lattice.

THE PRINCE. The dawn is over; the sun has risen.

THE PRINCESS [*looking through the window*]. It is true, the sky is already red.

THE PRINCE. It signifies foul weather for him who shall start on a journey to-day.

THE PRINCESS. Who is that, my lord?

THE PRINCE. It is I.

THE PRINCESS [*starting*]. Ah!

THE PRINCE. Why do you tremble?

THE PRINCESS. My lord, such sudden news. A journey?

THE PRINCE. To-night I start on a journey.

THE PRINCESS. My lord, I entreat you—

THE PRINCE [*finishing her song*]:—

“ . . . begone, arise;

Dost thou not see

The daylight in the skies?

Ah! what has come to thee?”

That is how the song ends, I think.

THE PRINCESS. Do not mock me, my lord.

THE PRINCE. To-night I start on a journey—a long journey. Who knows where it ends?

THE PRINCESS. My lord, I do not understand.

THE PRINCE. I go to the wars.

THE PRINCESS. What wars, my lord?

THE PRINCE. To fight the rebels in a far country.

THE PRINCESS. But wherefore, my lord?

THE PRINCE. It is the Emperor's will.

THE PRINCESS. Ah!

THE PRINCE. The Emperor has done me great honour to choose me out of all his host of warriors to go to the wars. Few have returned from such wars.

THE PRINCESS. My lord, go not.

THE PRINCE. You do entreat me!

THE PRINCESS. Yes, my lord, I entreat you not to go.

THE PRINCE. Surely you know the Emperor's wish is law. Why do you tremble?

THE PRINCESS. Great is my fear.

THE PRINCE. Great is the Emperor's favour. To lead his soldiers into the hills it needs, they say, a man who holds his life cheap, and to whom death is a boon. Truly the Emperor has chosen well. He knows that I hold my life cheap; that death to me will be a boon; and that my wife shall never be lonely.

THE PRINCESS. My lord, do not go.

THE PRINCE. Fear you to be lonely without me?

THE PRINCESS. I entreat you to stay.

THE PRINCE. Wherefore should I stay? Some fear to leave a young wife at home. They fear betrayal, dishonour and broken faith.

I can have no such fear. There is no need for me to ask my wife to be true to me in my absence.

THE PRINCESS. I swear to be true when you are gone.

THE PRINCE. What need is there for any oath? You have sworn one oath long ago. There are deeds which cannot be done twice; just as there are deeds which, when done, can never be undone.

THE PRINCESS. I swear not to look on the face of a man till my lord returns.

THE PRINCE. I shall not return alive. They will bring back my body pierced with wounds and stretched on a shield. You know all this.

THE PRINCESS. Still shall I await you. I shall lie down beside you. I shall lie still, and they shall carry us together to the grave of our fathers.

THE PRINCE. What? Faithful to a ghost? Some women break their troth even to the living! And you so young! When I am dead, great fortune may await you. Who knows, even the Emperor himself might wed you? Great is his condescension.

THE PRINCESS. I swear, when you are gone, never to gaze on the face of another man, be you living or dead.

THE PRINCE. You swear this?

THE PRINCESS. I swear it.

THE PRINCE. Alas! it is difficult to believe. You are so willing to swear a second oath, that a foolish man might think you had forgotten the first oath sworn on your marriage day. Hardly could I believe so strange an oath.

THE PRINCESS. I will swear by the grave of our forefathers that I will never look on the face of another man. Will you believe me?

THE PRINCE. Surely that oath was already sworn and needs no repeating?

THE PRINCESS. I will swear by the shrines of the deathless gods.

THE PRINCE. A foolish oath, for when women love the gods are but a dream.

THE PRINCESS. Is there nothing, my lord, by which I can swear so that you shall believe me?

THE PRINCE. Nothing. It is useless to swear. I am as one dead, and the dead are deaf to all oaths. I have even forgotten that oath of long ago. All that I remember is that little song that you sang about the dawn and the faithless wife. Some songs echo even in the land of the dead, even in the halls of hell.

THE PRINCESS. Nevertheless, I shall swear, and you shall believe my oath.

She brings a cup and pours out some wine into it from a vial.

See, I drink to my lord's health, and to his journey, and to his safe return. I swear never to gaze on the face of a man till you return. I will be true to you in life and in death. I swear.

She drinks.

THE PRINCE. By what?

THE PRINCESS. By my dead body, my lord.

She falls down dead. As soon as the play is over the actors go out behind the screen. The audience applaud.

LADY LAWLESS gets up and walks down stage. There is a buzz of conversation. The words, "charming, charming," are heard.

LADY LAWLESS. I think after that a little refreshment is necessary, unless you'd like to go on with your bridge. Anyhow, for those who want it, there is supper in the dining room.

They all get up. General conversation, saying, "Charming, charming! beautifully acted!"

SIR HEDWORTH [to MADAME SAN PAOLO]. Shall we finish our rubber?

MADAME SAN PAOLO. By all means.

SIR HEDWORTH, MADAME SAN PAOLO, MRS. HYDE and POTEMKIN go out, R.

LADY LAWLESS. Madame Potemkin, I must go and give the actors some food, poor things! You will have some supper, won't you? Mr. Singleton, take Madame Potemkin into the dining room.

MADAME POTEMKIN. I shall be delighted; I'm quite hungry. How well they acted!

SINGLETON and MADAME POTEMKIN go out, L.

NAPIER [to SAN PAOLO]. Then we can't go on with our rubber.

LADY LAWLESS. Come and have supper with me, Monsieur San Paolo.

SAN PAOLO. No, thank you, Lady Lawless; I will watch the bridge.

LADY LAWLESS. Then you must bring the others as soon as they're ready. [To NAPIER] See that they come, Bertie.

SAN PAOLO goes into the room, R.

NAPIER. All right, Lady Lawless.

LADY LAWLESS goes out, L.

BYNG [*to CICELY*]. Let's go and have supper.

They go out, L.

MERVYN. What an extraordinary play. What did it all mean?

NAPIER. It's a pity Lee-Roberts wasn't here. He understands Chinese things. I think Eleonora Wilson acted beautifully. She's so clever.

MERVYN. But I mean, why did she kill herself?

NAPIER. Because she knew her husband knew; and she knew that he knew that she knew that he knew.

MERVYN. Oh, Lord! I shall go and get something to drink. Are you coming?

NAPIER. No, I must wait for the others.

MERVYN *goes out, R.* *Enter MRS. HYDE.*

MRS. HYDE. We're still playing, I'm dummy. My dear Bertie, come over here.

They walk across, R.

Were you ever quite so uncomfortable in your life?

NAPIER. Wasn't it awful? With San Paolo standing there by the fireplace and looking like Hamlet.

MRS. HYDE. More like Othello. I never saw anything like it. When he was playing bridge, every time he was dummy he came and sat at our table; and now he's sitting at our table as white as a ghost.

NAPIER. I suppose it's worse now?

MRS. HYDE. Yes, of course. Heaven knows how it will end.

NAPIER. Have you nearly finished playing, or are you going on?

MRS. HYDE. No, we've nearly finished.

Enter SIR HEDWORTH, MADAME SAN PAOLO, and POTEMKIN and SAN PAOLO. As they walk in SAN PAOLO whispers something to MADAME SAN PAOLO.

POTEMKIN. It's all over. [*To MRS. HYDE*] I owe you twelve francs.

SIR HEDWORTH. Let's go and have supper. One wants something to eat after listening to all that— [*To MADAME SAN PAOLO*] Will you come to the dining room?

MADAME SAN PAOLO. I'll come directly, Sir Hedworth.

SIR HEDWORTH [*to MRS. HYDE and the others*]. Well, let's go.

SIR HEDWORTH, MRS. HYDE, POTEMKIN and NAPIER go
out, L.

MADAME SAN PAOLO. What is it?

SAN PAOLO. Did you enjoy the play?

MADAME SAN PAOLO. Is that all you want to know, Carlo?

SAN PAOLO. It's not, I think, a very irrelevant question.

MADAME SAN PAOLO. Tell me quickly what you want to tell me.

SAN PAOLO. I thought it was a very interesting play—very interesting indeed. It gave me an idea.

MADAME SAN PAOLO. What?

SAN PAOLO. Directly the Princess saw her husband knew she swore she would never see her lover again.

MADAME SAN PAOLO. I don't understand.

SAN PAOLO. You do understand very well. However—well, I will not waste time. I have a proposition to make. Englishmen don't fight duels, and you can't drink poison, so there is not much that I can do. But I can do one thing; I can give you a choice. If you want us to go on together you must swear to me to give up this thing for ever. When I sail to America from Italy you must come with me without coming back here first, and never see him again and have no communication with him again. Either that, or you must leave me and the children and go your own way. I will not have any compromise. I will not shut my eyes. I have borne it long enough. I give you five minutes to think it over.

MADAME SAN PAOLO. It is not necessary, one is enough.

SAN PAOLO. You have decided.

MADAME SAN PAOLO. Yes.

SAN PAOLO. You will come to Italy?

MADAME SAN PAOLO. Yes.

SAN PAOLO. And you will promise?

MADAME SAN PAOLO. Yes, yes.

SAN PAOLO. And no letters?

MADAME SAN PAOLO. No, no.

SAN PAOLO. Very well, I believe you. I don't need a cup—or an oath—

MADAME SAN PAOLO. But I ask you one favour. Go home and send the motor back for me and let me say good-bye.

SAN PAOLO. Never.

MADAME SAN PAOLO. I shan't be five minutes.

SAN PAOLO. Very well—and after all, why not? I will give you ten minutes.

Enter NAPIER.

NAPIER. Oh! Lady Lawless sent me to see what you are doing.

MADAME SAN PAOLO. Carlo has got to go home at once. He's going to send the motor back for me. You see, he's very busy.

NAPIER. Yes, of course.

MADAME SAN PAOLO. Carlo, go and say good-bye to them quick.

SAN PAOLO. Very well.

He goes out, L.

MADAME SAN PAOLO. And I must go directly he sends the motor back. I don't want to have supper. I don't want to get caught. You see, I haven't time. And, Mr. Napier, it is most probable I shall go to America straight. We think it will be better.

NAPIER. I'll tell Sir Hedworth you're going.

MADAME SAN PAOLO. Thank you.

NAPIER goes out, R. MADAME SAN PAOLO sits down and begins to cry. She controls herself, however, by the time SIR HEDWORTH arrives. He comes in, L.

SIR HEDWORTH. Are you going so soon?

MADAME SAN PAOLO [*very calm and self-controlled*]. I've got very little time. I have promised to go as soon as the motor comes back. It will be back directly. Carlo spoke to me just now. He said Englishmen don't fight duels. He said I must either give you up and never see you again or communicate with you, or else give him up and the children. He told me to choose then and there. What could I do? What could I say? I had been afraid of this all the time. I was afraid he would spring it upon me when we were in Italy. That play was the last straw, and in a way it is a merciful providence, because at least we can say good-bye.

SIR HEDWORTH. Yes, and perhaps it is a merciful providence, because, you see, I'm dying.

MADAME SAN PAOLO. No, no, you must get well.

SIR HEDWORTH. Now! What would be the use?

MADAME SAN PAOLO. We shan't be able to write. I shall keep my promise, but I shall always be with you all the same. We can do without letters. I have always understood and known everything you were thinking of, and you the same. I shall never change, whatever happens. I shall always feel the same and think the same. There has only been one thing that has counted in my life.

SIR HEDWORTH (*taking hold of her hand*). God bless you, my dearest. I shan't have long to live now—but all the time I have—

NAPIER [*speaking very loud in the next room*]. Yes, Lady Lawless, I think they're in the drawing room.

SIR HEDWORTH and MADAME SAN PAOLO move away from one another. Enter LADY LAWLESS, NAPIER and MRS. HYDE, L.

LADY LAWLESS. Aren't you dying of hunger, Madame San Paolo?

After all that bridge and all that acting? We were. Won't you change your mind and come and have something to eat?

Enter FOOTMAN, L.

FOOTMAN [*to MADAME SAN PAOLO*]. Your motor is at the door, madame.

CURTAIN.

SCENE II.

The platform at a big station: evening. Train out of sight, R. or L. Just in front of the end of a wagon-lit are SAN PAOLO, MADAME SAN PAOLO, SERVANTS and PORTERS.

MADAME SAN PAOLO. Have you found my bag?

SAN PAOLO. The servants don't know anything about it. They said you had it.

MADAME SAN PAOLO. I gave it to you myself when we started.

SAN PAOLO. Yes, but I gave it you back.

MADAME SAN PAOLO. When?

SAN PAOLO. When we got into the motor.

MADAME SAN PAOLO. No, no, you didn't.

SAN PAOLO. Then it's been left behind.

MADAME SAN PAOLO. We must send Giovanni to fetch it at once.

SAN PAOLO. It's much too late. He would miss the train.

MADAME SAN PAOLO. I won't go without it. I can't. It's got everything I want in it. I don't mind if I miss the train. I'll come by the next train.

SAN PAOLO. Oh! don't be so foolish.

MADAME SAN PAOLO. It's not foolish; but I won't go without my bag.

SAN PAOLO. Did they look in the sleeper?

MADAME SAN PAOLO. Yes, of course. It's not there. I must go by the next train, that's all.

SAN PAOLO. Please be reasonable. I'll tell one of the secretaries—

MADAME SAN PAOLO. It's you who are unreasonable. Do you think I'm going to leave the only thing I want behind?

SAN PAOLO. But I'm sure it's here. I saw it.

MADAME SAN PAOLO. Then you'd better find it. I gave it to you.

SAN PAOLO. Are you going to be like this the whole time?

MADAME SAN PAOLO. Please find my bag.

SAN PAOLO. Very well, we'll miss the train. It's most inconvenient.

MADAME SAN PAOLO. Do you think I care if I miss fifty trains. Do you think I care for convenience—*your* convenience?

SAN PAOLO. I advise you to be careful.

MADAME SAN PAOLO [*passionately*]. And I advise you to be careful! Don't think you can frighten me. I won't stand it.

SAN PAOLO. Please don't make a scene in public.

MADAME SAN PAOLO. I won't be terrorised.

SAN PAOLO. For heaven's sake, be quiet.

MADAME SAN PAOLO. Do you think I care for what people think? Quite seriously, I won't start without my bag. I'll come by the night train.

SAN PAOLO. I see, you arranged all this.

MADAME SAN PAOLO. That's not true. No, no.

SAN PAOLO. Well, if you stay, I stay.

MADAME SAN PAOLO. If I leave this station I leave it alone. I will never set eyes on you again as long as I live.

SAN PAOLO. As you please. You can do as you like.

MADAME SAN PAOLO. Very well, I've settled. I will go. You can say what you please—to the people—

SAN PAOLO. Here's Potemkin.

Enter POTESKIN, MADAME POTESKIN and NAPIER.

MADAME POTESKIN. I was terribly afraid we were late.

POTESKIN [*shaking hands*]. How do you do? I have brought you these flowers.

MADAME SAN PAOLO. Thank you, so very much. It's too kind of you. They are quite beautiful.

SAN PAOLO [*to MADAME POTESKIN*]. My wife has lost her bag. I will have one more look in the car.

He gets into the car.

NAPIER [*shaking hands with MADAME SAN PAOLO*]. We are in plenty of time, after all.

MADAME SAN PAOLO. Yes. The train doesn't go yet.

NAPIER. Princess Charles was starting for Venice to-night; we have got to go and see her off, and I was terribly afraid it would clash. Luckily, she's not going till to-morrow.

MADAME SAN PAOLO. Poor people. You'll be sick of the station.

MADAME POTESKIN. Half one's life in diplomacy is spent at the station, isn't it?

MADAME SAN PAOLO. Yes, indeed.

NAPIER. Do you go straight through?

MADAME SAN PAOLO. Yes.

MADAME POTESKIN. What time do you get to Ravenna?

MADAME SAN PAOLO. In the evening; no, I think in the morning; I forget.

SAN PAOLO comes down from the carriage; he shakes hands with NAPIER.

SAN PAOLO. It was in the car the whole time, after all.

MADAME SAN PAOLO. I suppose you put it there.

SAN PAOLO. You must have put it there. Well, that's all right. I gave you your ticket.

MADAME SAN PAOLO. No, Carlo, you said Giovanni had got them.

SAN PAOLO. But I distinctly remember giving you yours.

MADAME SAN PAOLO. Perhaps. I forget. It may be in my bag.

SAN PAOLO. You really are terrible, Angelica.

MADAME SAN PAOLO. Well, you can look in the bag.

SAN PAOLO *goes back into the car.* Enter MERVYN.

MERVYN [*shaking hands with* MADAME SAN PAOLO]. I'm awfully sorry you're going away, Madame San Paolo. We shall miss you at the Embassy, shan't we, Bertie? When I was acting as private secretary to the Ambassador you were the only people he would always let me ask without any argument.

NAPIER. There's Miss Cicely looking for us. Go and fetch her, Mervyn.

MERVYN *goes off.*

MADAME SAN PAOLO. Perhaps we shall meet in America, Mr. Napier; try and get appointed there; and when we come back you must come and stay with us at Ravenna, won't you?

NAPIER. Yes, of course. Are you going straight?

MADAME SAN PAOLO. Yes, it's settled.

Enter LADY LAWLESS *and* CICELY.

LADY LAWLESS. We went to the wrong platform. How do you do, Madame San Paolo? Of course, it's not true that you're going away for good, is it? You'll be back in three weeks, won't you?

MADAME SAN PAOLO. I'm afraid it is true. We're going straight to America. We've let the apartment, you see.

LADY LAWLESS. That's too horrible. Hedworth will be miserable. All his friends go away; and I don't know what to do to amuse him. It was so good of you to come last night; your last night, too, and I'm afraid you were all bored to tears by the play.

MADAME SAN PAOLO. Not at all.

LADY LAWLESS. I couldn't very well refuse to do it. Eleonora Wilson's such an old friend of Hedworth's. He used to be passionately in love with her once. Before we married, of course. By the way, we're going to try and get away next week. They think the crisis will be over, and we shall try and go to Biarritz or somewhere

and get some fresh air ; I think it will do Hedworth good. He'll be here in a minute. He's been buttonholed by some official. [SAN PAOLO *comes out of the train : she walks up to him.*] How do you do, Monsieur San Paolo ? It's too naughty of you to go away like this, and to take your dear wife too. We had counted on her staying at least six months longer, and now you're going to that horrid America. But perhaps you'll change your mind and come back, after all ?

SAN PAOLO. I'm afraid not, Lady Lawless, we shall sail direct.

Enter SIR HEDWORTH : he shakes hands with SAN PAOLO and MADAME SAN PAOLO.

LADY LAWLESS. Ah ! here he is. Hedworth, I was just telling Monsieur San Paolo that it is too bad of him to go away like this and to take Madame San Paolo, when we were looking forward to her being here the whole summer. We soon shan't have any friends left, shall we ? Everybody seems to be going. The Careys went this morning, and Mr. Byng.

MADAME SAN PAOLO. Really, for good ?

LADY LAWLESS. Yes, for good. He's going to Berne. He won't like it, poor boy, but it will be good for him. He was always getting into mischief here.

MADAME POTEMKIN [*to SAN PAOLO*]. If I come to America while you're there you must come and stay with us.

SAN PAOLO. Charmed, I am sure.

LADY LAWLESS. Your Ambassador is away, isn't he. Is that nice looking man your chargé d'affaires now ?

SAN PAOLO. Yes, Careggi—you don't know him ?

LADY LAWLESS. No, I should like to.

SAN PAOLO. Let me present him to you.

They walk off, L.

SIR HEDWORTH [*to MADAME SAN PAOLO*]. I'm afraid you'll be very hot.

MADAME SAN PAOLO. Stifling. Lady Lawless told me you are going away. I'm so glad.

SIR HEDWORTH. There's an idea of it if things go smoothly.

MADAME SAN PAOLO. Lady Lawless said Biarritz.

SIR HEDWORTH. Oh! no. We'll go to Aix-les-Bains if we go anywhere. And you go to Ravenna?

MADAME SAN PAOLO. Yes, for three weeks. Then we sail from Naples.

LADY LAWLESS, SAN PAOLO *and the* ITALIAN CHARGÉ D'AFFAIRES *walk on. The* ITALIAN CHARGÉ D'AFFAIRES *shakes hands with* SIR HEDWORTH.

SAN PAOLO. That was a charming entertainment you gave us last night, Sir Hedworth.

SIR HEDWORTH. She is clever, isn't she?

SAN PAOLO. I thought the play so good; so poetical and at the same time so real. It's so seldom one sees anything real on the stage.

Enter STATION-MASTER.

NAPIER [*to* SAN PAOLO]. I think your Chancery servant wants to speak to you.

SAN PAOLO *goes to speak to the* STATION-MASTER *without going off the stage.*

MADAME SAN PAOLO [*to* CICELY]. It's very dear of you, Cicely, to have come.

CICELY. I'm dreadfully sorry you're going.

LADY LAWLESS. She wants change of air. You look dreadfully seedy, my child. You know, she sits up late reading. I always tell her not to, but nothing that I can say is of the slightest use, is it, darling? However, when we're young we don't bother about our looks.

CAREGGI. I believe Miss Lawless is a great tennis player.

LADY LAWLESS. Yes, we have tennis on Thursdays. Will you come next Thursday, Monsieur Careggi?

CAREGGI. I shall be quite charmed.

LADY LAWLESS. And you, too, Monsieur Potemkin. You didn't come yesterday. But we may be abroad. In that case I'll let you know, or you could come and play in any case. There's sure to be someone playing.

SAN PAOLO. I think it's time we should say good-bye.

CAREGGI. They have plenty of time.

SAN PAOLO. We mustn't keep you all here the whole morning.

LADY LAWLESS. You must write us a line from Ravenna before you go, won't you?

Enter the GUARD.

GUARD. Take your seats, please.

LADY LAWLESS [*to MADAME SAN PAOLO*]. Well, good-bye, dear [*kisses her*]. I hope you'll have a nice journey and a nice time in America. Don't break too many hearts there. [*To MADAME POTESKIN*] All your countrymen will be madly in love with her, won't they? Good-bye.

MADAME SAN PAOLO. Good-bye, Lady Lawless. Good-bye, Cicely. Take care of yourself and go abroad. Good-bye, Sir Hedworth.

She shakes hands with all of them in turn.

SIR HEDWORTH. Good-bye.

SAN PAOLO. Au revoir, Sir Hedworth. I hope we may meet at another post. Thank you for all your kindness and for asking us to dinner last night. It will be a very pleasant souvenir.

They shake hands with CAREGGI, two ITALIAN SECRETARIES, the POTESKINS, NAPIER and MERVYN, and they get into the carriage. MADAME SAN PAOLO stands on the step of the sleeping car.

LADY LAWLESS. Have you got a book for the journey?

MADAME SAN PAOLO. Yes, thank you.

EVERYBODY [*in chorus*]. Good-bye.

LADY LAWLESS. Don't forget us.

SAN PAOLO *stands behind* MADAME SAN PAOLO *at the door of the car. The crowd close up round the carriage.*

Au revoir.

CAREGGI. Bon voyage.

POTEMKIN. Don't forget your bridge.

MADAME POTEMKIN. Get made Ambassador quick.

LADY LAWLESS. Good-bye.

EVERYBODY [*in chorus*] Good-bye.

The GUARD makes a signal and blows a whistle.

CURTAIN.

MANFROY, DUKE OF ATHENS.

A PLAY IN FIVE ACTS.

To K.

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

THE DUKE OF ATHENS.

MANFROY, his Counsellor and favourite (afterwards Duke of Athens).

PALAMON. Manfroy's son.

DIMITRIUS	}	Courtiers.
BERITOLA		
PASIMUND		
ORMISDA		

LYSIMACHUS, a Magistrate.

GAULTIER, COUNT OF ANGERS.

EVANDER, a noble of Cyprus.

MARATO, his confidant.

CHICHIBIO, Manfroy's fool.

NICOSTRATUS, Captain of a galley.

A FRIAR.

PISARIO, Chief of a band of banditti.

GRACCHO, a Brigand.

DURAZZO, a Fisherman.

GNOTHO, his son.

CIMBRIO, a Thief.

JOAN, Wife of Manfroy.

PRINCESS ALATHIEL (afterwards Sister Monica), daughter of the King of Babylon.

CALISTA.

LYDIA, Joan's attendant.

LUSCA, Calista's attendant.

CLEON, Servant to Manfroy.

COURTIERS, GUESTS, GALLEY SLAVES, MONKS, PAGES, etc.

The action takes place at Athens and in the outskirts, and Cyprus, during the period of the French or Italian domination, as fantastically described by Boccaccio.

ACT I.

SCENE I.

A room in MANFROY'S house. MANFROY discovered with CHICHIBIO.

Enter PAGE.

PAGE. I come from my master Count Dimitrius; he bade me bring to you this drinking cup, a token of friendship on your birthday.

MANFROY. Tell your master I thank him heartily, and I shall thank him more warmly at our feast to-night, which we trust he will honour

PAGE. My duty, sir.

Exit PAGE.

MANFROY. More gifts, Chichibio.

CHICHIBIO. I fear the Greeks, especially their gifts.

MANFROY. Dimitrius is my friend.

CHICHIBIO. All friends are fast when the weather's fair;
But when the tempest blows, beware.

MANFROY. Keep your fool's talk for others.

CHICHIBIO. I'm paid for folly, beat for sense;
I earn more fisticuffs than pence.
Should friendship not be tried?
Should fellowship not laugh at wind and tide?
Is friendship but a show?
Dame Fortune, as you know,
Lends a changed aspect to her favourite,
When, with a turn of the wrist,
She whirls him from the sunlight to the pit.

MANFROY. A bubble melting in the mist,
A dew-drop glistening in the noon,
Is fortune's boon.
That tempting dew cheats not the wise,
For fortune's slave is he who seeks her gift,
Which I despise ;
And though she sift
My soul, like wheat,
Unconquered in defeat,
I still shall rob her of the victory,
Nor yield a sigh,
Nor in her darkness moan ;—
There I must stand alone.

CHICHIBIO. Alone with God, perchance ?

MANFROY. A man implores no ghostly aid
Provided ready-made
By juggling priests for changing circumstance.
A soul in anguish has no room for lies.

CHICHIBIO. Sir, you are wise,
Most foolish I, who thought that constancy
Was valued in adversity ;
That men of help and fellowship had need,
Of ghostly comfort most of all,
Yes, need of Mother Church, of priest and creed.
You need them not ; 'tis well ;
But oh ! my lord, I smile at you,
Your world is small ;
The knowledge that you lack is dearly bought,
And 'twixt the fancied mishap and the true
The gulf is far too wide for thought.
Now let us tell your assets : firstly, health,
And next, your solid wealth.

- MANFROY. My galleys are at sea ;
Their loss would bring me penury.
- CHICHIBIO. A child who loves you ; and a wife.
- MANFROY. Death by their loss might devastate my life.
- CHICHIBIO. Yet things there are than death more hateful ;
And wives are frail, and sons ungrateful.
Your friends—a host.
- MANFROY. Fair-weather friends ; at best and most.
A friend is but a toy.
- CHICHIBIO. Then is it faith in everlasting joy
Steels you to meet the stress ?
- MANFROY. No, fool, what priests profess
Is food for women, not for me ;
I need the truth, no make-believe
Such as the cronies weave ;
No stone of false philosophy
To prove me black is white,
And dark than day more bright.
Now I am fortune-favoured ; if to-morrow
She casts the dice of sorrow,
I shall accept her throw without demur.
- CHICHIBIO. A stoic, sir !
- MANFROY. A man ! You have it in one syllable.
- CHICHIBIO. There was a man, so I've heard tell,
He hoped not for heaven, and feared not hell.

He laughed at riches, he scoffed at fame,
He swore that love was a foolish game,
And virtue only a hollow name.

But the devil he stabbed the man with desire,
Sweet as honey, and fierce as fire.

And the man he bended his haughty knee,
And he cried to Heaven: "Have mercy on me."

The soul is old, but the heart is young;
He scorns the adder who never was stung.

MANFROY. My heart and my soul are twins, and both are old and wise in the foreknowledge of necessity.

Enter a PAGE.

PAGE. A friar craves to see your Grace. He is the bearer of a message.

CHICHIBIO. A friar has come to steal your soul. Talk of the devil or of his erstwhile colleague, the bright archangel,—both are always there ready at hand to seize their advantage and to snatch their prey.

MANFROY. I will see him now; leave us.

CHICHIBIO. I wish the friar good fortune; and a lasting conversion; and to you, sincere contrition and clean shrift.

Exeunt CHICHIBIO and PAGE. Enter the FRIAR.

MANFROY. Good-morrow, friar.

FRIAR. May the Lord grant thy heart's desire;
And save thy soul from wickedness.

MANFROY. I worship in no church, no faith profess,
And, save the truth, respect no deity.

FRIAR. The truth is God, and God hath summoned thee.

MANFROY. Whence come you and what is your embassy?

FRIAR. I bring a message from beyond the skies;
I am from paradise.

MANFROY. For alms and dole?

FRIAR. From God, for thy immortal soul.

MANFROY. If God has made the world, as you believe,
He needs not to retrieve
My soul;
It is a part of the tremendous whole,

- Which he was great enough to mould.
FRIAR. He needs thy soul, and for eternity.
MANFROY. There lived a doctor in the days of old,
To whom the devil promised his heart's desire,
Should he surrender, when he died,
His soul to everlasting fire.
The doctor signed his soul away,
The devil gave him Helen for a bride.
So you too, friar, have come to buy;
What can you tender?
The loan of what felicity
Can I with my immortal soul repay?
FRIAR. God barter not. Man must to God surrender;
And give his soul, and in return
Receive such gifts as worldlings spurn;
The gifts of God, beyond all price:
Contrition, sorrow, sacrifice.
MANFROY. Are these the only gifts you bring?
And is my soul so slight a thing?
FRIAR. I barter not. God summons thee; obey.
Give Him thy soul, to-day;
And at the end, and in the life to be,
Attain felicity.
MANFROY. Kind friar, I shall not subscribe
One virtue practised for a bribe;
It has no worth.
FRIAR. Without God's aid
There is no virtue on the earth.
MANFROY. O friar, you were faithful made;
For some with faith are born,
As others beauty, skill adorn,
But faithless I shall live and faithless die;

I claim not God's paternity,
Nor yet your everlasting light ;
For suns may set and suns may rise,
But we, when our brief rushlight dies,
(So saith the Roman in sweet pagan song),
Must all sleep through the same, the long
Unending night.
That is my creed ;
No more I need.

FRIAR. We all need more ; too frail a race
To fight the passions, save for Grace.
What are we ? Sinners ; in thy soul the seed
Of sin shall some day flower.

MANFROY. I do not fear that hour.

FRIAR. The devil seals thine eyes with pride.
For God, Who gave thee joy and health,
Fortune, regard of men, and wealth,
May take away ; then shalt thou turn
And crave what thou dost spurn.
Await not the turn of the tide.

MANFROY. If prosperous I bow no knee
In false idolatry,
Far less shall I, distressful, seek
The refuge of the meek.

FRIAR. Basking in fortune's favour,
Thou knowest not the savour,
More salt than brine,
Of sorrow's wine.

MANFROY. I am prepared for all that fate can send ;
And though she rend
And break me on her wheel,
From my white lips she shall not wrench a groan.

- FRIAR. Thy will is obdurate as steel ;
But the soul is God's alone,
His child, and in the night
The child shall cry for light.
- MANFROY. Oh ! unconsulted, unconsenting we
Wake to perplexity ;
Nor ever know
Whence we have come, nor whither we must go.
You fashion God in your own guise,
And build of dreams a paradise ;
You preach eternal fire,
But He who lit desire
In man for sin, and let the evil be,
'Tis He, not we, deserves the blame,
The everlasting flame.
If God be infinite in power,
Why did he let the seed of evil flower ?
Allow His brightest angel to rebel
And fall from heaven down to hell ?
- FRIAR. Man is too small to gauge God's mysteries ;
He is beyond the span of our surmise.
One day you shall consent,
And bless the travail of divine content.
- MANFROY. No, friar, come calamity,
Pain, sorrow, and shame ;
If I shall ever cry on bended knee :
" Have mercy on me in my misery,
Mine is the sin, and mine the blame,"
To God or any Holy Name,
Then take my soul. You shall have won ;
It shall be yours till time is done.
- FRIAR. Amen. Till time is done.

SCENE II.

MANFROY'S house. *A large hall opening on to a loggia and a garden beyond, which is lit up. The hall opens on to further rooms on the right and left. These rooms are crowded with GUESTS, COURTIER, and MINSTRELS. Enter CHICHIBIO and LYSIMACHUS.*

LYSIMACHUS. How many of those who acclaim Manfroy would lend him a farthing were he in need, or be true to him in misfortune?

CHICHIBIO. In misfortune, save yourself, not one. I doubt whether his friends are cleaving to him now that they batten on his bounty.

LYSIMACHUS. Have you evidence?

CHICHIBIO. Only the smile on the moon and the flight of a magpie, but I know that courtiers are envious and that Dimitrius is a Greek.

LYSIMACHUS. Manfroy has made Dimitrius and raised him from obscurity to eminence. Dimitrius is his boon companion.

CHICHIBIO. Yet the Greek is waiting, waiting, with a sidelong eye.

LYSIMACHUS. But where is the gain? How could the ruin of Manfroy benefit him?

CHICHIBIO. Envy, sir, cares not for benefit. The envious man must be first among all others. Manfroy is careless and blind. So is the duke. He is insecure in the allegiance of his courtiers, many of whom are turning their eyes towards the king of Sparta, who is young and foolish enough to please them.

LYSIMACHUS. Manfroy would never desert the duke.

CHICHIBIO. That is why they all detest my master, especially his best friend and his worst enemy. They feel that he is made of a nobler substance and would never stoop to use the weapons they affect, such as venom, slander, and falsehood.

LYSIMACHUS. The duke will never desert Manfroy.

CHICHIBIO. A prince has no feelings or ties, he is a terrible engine in the hands of a schemer. For he reasons that the security of the state is hazarded as well as that of his person. He will shelve all personal ties as soon as they incommode him, like an irksome garment, satisfying his conscience with the plea that his conduct is dictated by reasons of state. It is folly to live at court unless you are a hired fool like myself. For the whole world knows there is nothing so false as a courtier and so ungrateful as a prince.

LYSIMACHUS. Why do men seek the favour of the great and seek it at court?

CHICHIBIO. Men must have toys to play with. The more worthless they are the better for man. But Manfroy's toys are great and perilous things, such as love of country, service, constancy, endeavour, duty, and sacrifice.

LYSIMACHUS. He enjoys his toys, he loves the game.

CHICHIBIO. The game has scarce begun. Hark to the street minstrel!

A WANDERING MINSTREL *sings outside.*

Fame is a wanton breeze
That never constant stays;
It flatters the tall trees,
And with a kiss betrays.

Joy is a bubble blown,
Painted with colours rare;
Grasp it, the hues have flown
Into the empty air.

Love is a fragrant flower
To-day, and dead to-morrow,
Leaving after an hour
A legacy of sorrow.

Love is not worth a sigh,
And I have done with fame ;
Dig for me where I lie
A grave without a name.

CHICHIBIO. A gay song for a festival ; but listen, I hear the sailors chanting.

SAILORS are heard singing outside.

Star of pathless ocean,
Guard our wives and daughters ;
Listen to us calling
From the waste of waters.

Star that never settest,
Shine upon our wishes,
Bid our nets be laden
With a draught of fishes.

Shine upon our vessel,
Hear thy sailors crying ;
Pray for us poor sinners,
Now, and when we're dying.

CHICHIBIO. Two philosophies ; that of this world and that of the next. Let us glance at the minstrels and the mischief-makers before they go.

For life is a gamble,
Take heed lest you fall ;
Be first in the scramble,
Or go to the wall.

They go out. Enter JOAN and GAULTIER OF ANGERS.

GAULTIER. At last ! I thought we never should be free
One moment from that throng importunate.

JOAN. Nor can it be for long ; make haste, my heart,
GAULTIER. All is prepared.

JOAN. I know.

GAULTIER. At the little gate
I shall be waiting, when as I see the lamp
Extinguished in the casement. That will be
As soon as the feast is ended.

JOAN. When they go,
I shall plead weariness unto my lord,
He will not question me. He dwells aloof.
For ever in the city of his dream,
His cold, exalted, ivory citadel ;
Then, cloaked and masked, I shall steal down the
stair

Into the garden, thence into the street,
And there, beloved, I shall find you. Ah !
I think that nothing shall impede our purpose,
Nor mar our plan. But yet I feel, I feel
As though we sowed the seeds of dreadful things.

GAULTIER. You will forget these fancies when we sail
In my good galley to the shores of France.

JOAN. Whither ? For what first port of call ?

GAULTIER. We'll make

The city of Cydonia in Crete,
Then Syracuse in golden Sicily.

JOAN. For ever I have dreamt of Sicily,
Of fields of Enna, where the gloomy king
Snatched Proserpine from fields of flowers and corn.

GAULTIER. The fields of Enna will forget her footfall
When you shall tread them with a softer touch.

JOAN. And I have dreamt a ship would come for me
And carry me to kingdoms of sweet song.

GAULTIER. Then we shall sail to blue Neapolis.
JOAN. And pluck fair Paestum's roses.
GAULTIER. Thence to France,
To the proud city of Massilia.
JOAN. And is Massilia bright as Sicily?
GAULTIER. A city of rippling laughter and wine and song,
And glittering triremes riding in the bay.
JOAN. Shall I be happy in Massilia?
GAULTIER. As happy as the Queen of Babylon
In her green paradise of lofty leaves.
JOAN. Shall I be lonely in Massilia?
GAULTIER. As lonely as the moon in a swarm of stars.
JOAN. Shall I miss Athens in Massilia?
GAULTIER. As Proserpine, when rescued from the dark,
Missed the dominions of untearful Dis.
JOAN. And shall you love me in Massilia?
GAULTIER. Then as to-day, to-morrow, yesterday,
But ever more to-day than yesterday.
JOAN. And yet we pay for every joy we steal,
And I am robbing this rich mint of joy.
GAULTIER. You paid for it with sorrow in the past.
JOAN. Yes, I have been most lonely. Hark, the music
Begins once more. You must not linger now.
My heart, beloved heart, all shall be well.

Exit GAULTIER. *Enter* DIMITRIUS, BERITOLA, and
ORMISDA.

DIMITRIUS. Hail, gracious lady. Manfroy is fortunate, and well
deserves what fortune has bestowed on him.

JOAN. Thank you, my lord. I await the flourish of the Duke's
clarions.

Enter MANFROY.

DIMITRIUS. Your festival hath every grace.

MANFROY. And a galaxy of jewels, all of you, my friends. But come, Joan, we must wait for the Duke at the gateway.

Exeunt JOAN and MANFROY.

DIMITRIUS. But if the King acts hastily, we shall be lost.

ORMISDA. The plot is unsuspected?

DIMITRIUS. The King of Sparta enjoys the Duke's confidence and the trust of Manfroy; but I fear his hasty spirit. The King is impetuous; if he moves too soon the plot will fail.

BERITOLA. What do you advise?

DIMITRIUS. Ormisda must go to Sparta and persuade the King to withhold his hand till our affairs are ripe.

ORMISDA. In secret?

DIMITRIUS. In broad day.

ORMISDA. But how?

DIMITRIUS. You must tell Manfroy to-night of a damsel whom you love; she dwells at court in Sparta; she needs you; you must go; so that the Duke may grant leave, you must beg Manfroy to take you with him thither. The Duke never has said "No" to Manfroy. Manfroy must ask permission to accompany you.

ORMISDA. Why should he go to Sparta?

DIMITRIUS. Purposes of policy.

ORMISDA. But if he should hear of the plot?

DIMITRIUS. There? Never! Manfroy has no scent for plots until they hatch beneath his nose. You must go to-morrow.

ORMISDA. To-morrow night Beritola and myself meet Pasimunda to clinch our covenant.

DIMITRIUS. The day after to-morrow, then, will be soon enough. The trumpet!

Enter the DUKE OF ATHENS, with MANFROY, JOAN and COURTIER.

DUKE. We come to offer our greetings. You have deserved our

praise, and served us loyally, dear Manfroy. We are grateful. May God and His saints preserve your life and reward you.

MANFROY. My lord, you overwhelm me.

DIMITRIUS. It is rare for fortune to bestow well earned favours ; by honouring you she atones for many misdeeds. Long life to Manfroy.

DUKE. Well said ; long life to Manfroy and to his fair lady.

*The DUKE drinks of a cup and pledges MANFROY ;
DIMITRIUS and the COURTIERs do likewise.*

MANFROY. My lord, and you, my friends, I thank you ; throughout my life my aim has been to serve the Duke, Athens, and the commonweal. I pray you to come into the gardens, where song and dancing await us.

*The DUKE, MANFROY and the COURTIERs go out. Enter
CLEON and LYSIMACHUS.*

LYSIMACHUS. What is this business for my special ear ?

CLEON. Sir, I have grave news.

LYSIMACHUS. I listen.

CLEON. Lord Manfroy.

LYSIMACHUS. Well ?

CLEON. His ships, which had sailed to Crete and Neapolis, have suffered shipwreck. Every one of them is lost, his merchandise is at the bottom of the sea. He is a ruined man.

LYSIMACHUS. This is sad news indeed, Cleon.

CLEON. But the Duke, sir, will help him fill the needy gap and repair his fortune. For my lord's services to Athens are worth many thousand bags of gold. And what is gold to the Duke of Athens ?

LYSIMACHUS. I fear you have not reckoned on your master.

CLEON. Alas ! I know that he is un beholden to any man, and will take no favour from a friend, still less from a prince ; but what must I do ? Must I inform my lord now ?

LYSIMACHUS. Wait until the guests have departed; the feast is nearly done and soon the Duke will be going. When all have bid good-night, tell him what you have told me.

CLEON. I will obey.

Exit CLEON.

LYSIMACHUS. O fortune, mocking fortune,
O blindfold goddess, to thy insensate wheel
Securely bound, we on the sunlit curve
Triumphantly inhale the heady breeze,
Unconscious of our fellows who below
Are crushed in an oblivious whirl of darkness.
If ever a mortal man deserved thy gifts,
It is the upright, the high-hearted Manfroy,
Free-souled and single-minded, wise and great,
Who never gave a thought to his own advantage.
Therefore I fear, albeit the Duke protect you,
Envy shall sap the fabric of your greatness
Now that no longer gold is the cement;
For men are slaves to gold, and poverty
They deem the most unpardonable crime.
Oh! would this had befallen any other,
Imperious and uncorrupted Manfroy!

Exit LYSIMACHUS. *Enter the* DUKE *and* DIMITRIUS.

DUKE. I cannot believe it; the King of Sparta, a life-long friend, and my ally!

DIMITRIUS. Yet he plots your overthrow. It is not all.

DUKE. Tell me the worst.

DIMITRIUS. I suspect confederates here.

DUKE. In Athens?

DIMITRIUS. At court. Some are here to-night.

DUKE. Ingratitude! What have I done, Dimitrius, deserving of treason? Whom do you suspect?

DIMITRIUS. To-morrow I shall know more. The net is ready but only spread. I have not yet caught the prey.

DUKE. I cannot believe it.

DIMITRIUS. To-morrow, sire, I will bring proof.

Enter MANFROY.

DUKE. I have never seen so rare a feast.

MANFROY. My lord, I crave your permission to absent myself from Athens.

DUKE. No sooner spoken than granted; but whither?

MANFROY. To Sparta.

DUKE. Alone?

MANFROY. I beg to take Ormisda with me.

DUKE. When would you start?

MANFROY. After to-morrow.

DUKE. Have you business in Sparta?

MANFROY. Business of state, my lord.

DUKE. Then wait on us to-morrow; I have grave matters to talk of. And now, friend, good-night.

MANFROY. My lord, I will conduct you.

DUKE. Farewell! At so rich a feast never shone so fair a lady.

Exeunt the DUKE, MANFROY and COURTIERs. Enter CHICHIBIO.

JOAN. The Duke has gone, the revellers depart, the torches are flickering, the feast is done.

CHICHIBIO. It was a good feast.

JOAN. I am weary. The noise, the lights, the song, have oppressed me. Tell the Count, kind fool, that I have gone to rest. Good-night. Sing me a song here by the windows; my casement's open and I shall hear it.

Exit JOAN.

CHICHIBIO [*sings*]:

Dear heart, fond heart, I suffer smart,
Heed thy distressful lover's cry;
The laughing spring is on the wing—
A little time and we must die.

O heart unkind, O bright eyes blind,
The smiling hours go stealing by,
And man and maid must fade, must fade;
A little time and we must die.

Cold heart, relent, dear heart, consent
(Alone and sorrowful am I),
Lest angry fate call out too late—
A little while and we must die.

O heart too dear, too far, too near,
Have pity on my misery;
For youth and May nor stoop nor stay—
A little while and we must die.

Enter MANFROY.

MANFROY. Where is my lady?

CHICHIBIO. Gone.

MANFROY. How?

CHICHIBIO. Gone to bed; she was wearied by the bustle of festivity.

MANFROY. And I am weary.

Enter CLEON.

CLEON. My lord, I bring you news.

MANFROY. Speak.

CLEON. My lord, I cannot speak this news. Read this message from the master of the port. [*MANFROY reads a letter.*] My lord, my lord, my services and of all those who served you here and everywhere are yours till you die. [*He kneels down.*]

MANFROY. Chichibio, my galleys have been wrecked. I am a ruined man! How often have I told you this might be? That riches were an accident, that mattered not in a wise man's life? Now I shall prove it. But alas! for Joan! I must tell her now. No, she's weary, the news must wait. Good-night, faithful Cleon.

CLEON *kisses MANFROY's hand.* *Exit* CLEON.

Poor Cleon, it stabs him sorely. Do not grieve, Chichibio, my dear old friend; you feel this more than I do. Riches do not signify; I am still Manfroy. You did not love me for my gold, you're wise enough to know its worth. But there is Joan, and you and Cleon. I must do without the luxury of a fool to teach me wisdom.

Enter LYDIA *and* CLEON.

LYDIA. My lady bade me give you this.

MANFROY [*reading it*]. The letter's brief; a subject for a ballad-monger. My lady sails to-night for Crete and thence to Massilia, where she will find an abode with the Count of Angers. Now I shall learn the breadth of that wide gulf between the fancied and the true misfortune.

END OF ACT I.

ACT II.

SCENE I.

A room in the DUKE's palace.

Enter MANFROY and DIMITRIUS.

MANFROY. My galleys have been wrecked, my merchandise is at the bottom of the sea ; to-day I shall tender to his highness my resignation of the posts I hold at court.

DIMITRIUS. You'll speak to a deaf ear.

MANFROY. A worse calamity has befallen me. My wife has left me. She sailed last night with the Count of Angers for Massilia.

DIMITRIUS. My poor friend. But there is work for you here at the court. We live in troubled times. Listen, but heed that what I am about to tell you be safely hidden.

MANFROY. You have my word, Dimitrius.

DIMITRIUS. There is a plot against the Duke.

MANFROY. In Athens ?

DIMITRIUS. The King of Sparta seeks the crown and plans invasion. He has confederates in the city.

MANFROY. Have you suspicions ?

DIMITRIUS. Yes, Beritola and Pasimund,—your friends.

MANFROY. No, Dimitrius, I am certain they are free from treachery. These men are loyal, but they may have been careless in their words. I will warn them, for they sup with me to-night. It is a sadder meeting than I had dreamed, for it will be the last of many.

DIMITRIUS. The Duke ! I will leave you with him.

Exit DIMITRIUS. Enter the DUKE.

DUKE. Manfroy, we have heard of your misfortune. All that we have is yours. This you know. We shall not do without you ; all shall be as it was before. You shall still be the mainstay of our court.

MANFROY. A pauper has no business at court, my lord ; let me resign my office, and seek such work as suits my station.

DUKE. Your work is here. But now to graver matters. [*Calling a PAGE*] Page, summon Count Dimitrius. Haply my news is not news to you. Dimitrius . . . but he shall speak. [*Enter DIMITRIUS.*] Dimitrius, is Manfroy privy to what you suspect ?

DIMITRIUS. Sir, I have told him everything.

DUKE. What do you say to this, Manfroy ?

MANFROY. The King of Sparta, Dimitrius tells me, means to invade us. He is young and reckless, that is all I know.

DIMITRIUS. I have proof.

DUKE. Dimitrius suspects a helping hand at court.

DIMITRIUS. I have no proof as yet.

DUKE. And you suspect ?

DIMITRIUS. I name no names. I will be more explicit when I can furnish proof.

DUKE. When will that be ?

DIMITRIUS. To-morrow, perhaps sooner.

DUKE. Confederates or no, you say that Sparta is menacing our throne ; what counter-steps, Manfroy, shall we take ?

MANFROY. Sire, I would let the king attack ; we are forewarned, and shall be ready. If we invade we justify him. This plot is bound to end in smoke, unless your noblemen desert you and the city side with Sparta. This can never be. Let us be ready, and if the king be rash enough to attack, he'll find the task greater than he dreamed, and far from winning your crown, may lose his own. I asked, my lord, your leave to go to Sparta, and now I ask permission not to go.

DUKE. Well spoken.

MANFROY. I beg to take my leave. Much remains for me to put in order.

DUKE. Farewell, Manfroy, till to-morrow. [*Exit MANFROY.*] His words are wise.

DIMITRIUS. If there were no confederates in Athens, then his words were wisdom's own. But I fear it is otherwise. The King of Sparta's cause is lost unless he has friends in his enemy's camp.

DUKE. What friends? Why this mystery?

DIMITRIUS. I shall have proof to-night.

DUKE. Their names.

DIMITRIUS. My lord, to-night.

DUKE. Now.

DIMITRIUS. I cannot bring charges without proof. To-night the Duke of Sparta's allies meet to make treason's terms, and to prepare the tools and engines of conspiracy. I fear that Pasimunda's clan is tainted, but these are only the instruments and not the leader of the plot.

DUKE. Who is the leader?

DIMITRIUS. I name no names. I fear they are men whom you trust.

DUKE. You make my blood run cold, Dimitrius.

DIMITRIUS. Search the world's history and you will find that plots against great kings were ever hatched by the men who stood nearest to them. Brutus killed his benefactor and followed the example of the knave who sold his Master for thirty pieces of silver and sealed the betrayal with a kiss. Love turned sour is the worst of hatreds and we suffer more by our friends than by our foes.

DUKE. What means this parable?

DIMITRIUS. That you are betrayed.

DUKE. Be careful, friend, make no rash charge; better were it for you to be unborn than to bear false witness against those I love.

DIMITRIUS. I have named no name.

DUKE. But I command you to name your names.

DIMITRIUS. Last night Joan, the wife of Manfroy, left him without a farewell. She was the daughter of a house which regarded loyalty more highly than the safety of their souls. She left him after the feast. She was virtuous, as you know well. She left behind her a son she loved; surely she had reason for her flight. She, a gentlewoman, proud and pure, a proverb for obedience. Now she has broken her vow and gone, who knows whither? She loved her lord and never smiled upon others, and had they been estranged her only child was there.

DUKE. You torture me. Whom is it you accuse? The Lady Joan? Her friend? Is this the reason that she left Manfroy?

DIMITRIUS. Not now, I have no proof.

DUKE. Then peace.

DIMITRIUS. To-night I will provide you proof. Follow me to-night to a certain house and there shall be no more room for doubt.

DUKE. I have heard enough. Leave me.

DIMITRIUS. My lord, my duty.

SCENE II.

A room in MANFROY'S house.

Enter MANFROY, LYSIMACHUS and CHICHIBIO.

MANFROY. Before the last guests I shall ever welcome here arrive, I desire a few words with you, Lysimachus and Chichibio. Rumour is in the air; there are hints of treason abroad, and I fear that Beritola and Ormisda may be in jeopardy. I know they are intemperate in speech and in deed. So presently, when they shall come, leave us together for a while, for I must warn them. When

our business is done we will meet in the hall and drink together, haply for the last time.

CHICHIBIO. Is Dimitrius bidden?

MANFROY. Dimitrius, Ormisda, and Beritola, the pick of my friends, and Pasimunda, their friend.

CHICHIBIO. I trust Dimitrius as much as I would the serpent in Eden.

MANFROY. So far your prophecies have miscarried. No sooner had my friends heard of my reverses than each one of them came and offered to share his goods with me.

CHICHIBIO. They knew you better than to fear you would accept a farthing.

MANFROY. The Duke was liberal in kind words.

CHICHIBIO. Words!

MANFROY. And deeds.

CHICHIBIO. A Duke of Athens can afford the luxury of gratitude. It costs him nothing and he cannot do without you.

MANFROY. He must do without me now, for I resign my offices to-morrow.

LYSIMACHUS. Why, sir?

MANFROY. I know what is in your mind, Lysimachus. I held office at the court and was paid for holding it? Why should I resign it? Before I was free, in spite of my duties; I had my own fortune as a foundation. Henceforward I should be a hireling, a pensioner. I mean to be un beholden, and once more to carve my own way in the world. To be free, Lysimachus, free.

LYSIMACHUS. Who is a free man in this world? I have never met him. To live is to serve.

MANFROY. Service is various. But, my friends, let us leave that, and listen to me. I feel, I know not why, the shadow of calamity. You will say that I have already had my share. I feel it to be otherwise. I believe that those ills merely cast their shadow before

them. They are the prologue to the tragedy. I have no inkling from what quarter the fates will attack me, but oh ! my friends, I am sorrowful, and not for what has been, but for what I fear is to come. Howsoever that may be . . . I want to say this : I look to you, Lysimachus, to take care of Palamon, my son, while I am away ; take him, and guard him safely till I return.

CHICHIBIO. But, my lord, what do you suspect ?

MANFROY. Nothing and everything. I feel the shadow and presage of undreamed of events. Like a wave from infinity apprehension rolls towards my soul.

LYSIMACHUS. Whatever may befall, we will be true to you till death, and serve your son, Palamon, as you would have us do.

Enter PALAMON, a little boy ten years old.

MANFROY. Thank you, Lysimachus.

PALAMON. Father.

MANFROY. What is it, child ?

PALAMON. I am afraid. I thought I heard knocking at the gate and a clash of arms, so I ran from my room. Father, do not desert me.

MANFROY. I am not deserting you, my little one.

PALAMON. Yes, father, you are leaving me. I heard you tell Lysimachus. Let me go with you. Mother has gone, and she will never come back. She has left me, and she never said good-bye. And now you are leaving me.

MANFROY. Listen, my Palamon, there are things which you cannot understand now, but you will understand them later. I am going away, but not for long ; I shall come back, and till I come back Lysimachus will take care of you and be a father to you. You must promise me to love him and obey him. You must not forget me, and always be sure that I have not forgotten you ; you must be as good as if I were here. Promise me that, Palamon.

PALAMON. I promise.

MANFROY. Never forget. I promise to come back. And now run to bed. Chichibio will take you. Good-night, my Palamon, my little one, my pretty one [*he kisses him*]. Leave me, Lysimachus. They come.

PALAMON. Good-bye, father.

[*Exeunt* LYSIMACHUS, CHICHIBIO *and* PALAMON. *Enter* BERITOLA, PASIMUNDA *and* ORMISDA.]

MANFROY. Welcome, my friends; before we go to sup I have a matter to debate. [*They seat themselves round a table.*] There are rumours of Sparta's treason against the Duke; they say that he will invade us, and that he has confederates here. Whether this be true I cannot say, but we must be circumspect. Ormisda, you must not go to Sparta. The hint of ties there may compromise you, and, by accident, lend colour to a harmless act. There is a traitor at Athens.

PASIMUNDA. Who told you this, Manfroy?

MANFROY. I am pledged to secrecy.

ORMISDA. Has the rumour reached the Duke?

MANFROY. My lips are sealed.

BERITOLA. What say you, Pasimunda and Ormisda?

ORMISDA. Has Dimitrius wind of the plot?

MANFROY. My say is said.

ORMISDA. Speak, Pasimunda.

BERITOLA. Speak, Pasimunda.

PASIMUNDA. The rumour that has reached you, Manfroy, is founded upon truth. There is a plot to overthrow the Duke, because of his tyranny, and give the crown to Sparta. To-night we proceed to execution, to-morrow morning the Duke shall be no more; a corpse, an exile, or a prisoner; and the King of Sparta, with Beritola and Dimitrius, Ormisda and myself shall rule in Athens, —and, as we hope, yourself.

MANFROY. You ask me to join you?

PASIMUNDA. We offer you a post, but not all-powerful influence as before; the reign of favourites must end; the nobles shall come into their own. All shall be equal in a free state.

MANFROY. I shall unmask your plot, proclaim your secret to the winds, and shout your treachery upon the housetops.

PASIMUNDA. Softly, my lord; if you reject our offer you shall not leave this house alive. My friends, is what I have said approved?

BERITOLA. Yes.

MANFROY rises. BERITOLA and ORMISDA go to the door and draw their swords.

PASIMUNDA. Manfroy, the game is lost. The doors are guarded. You are unarmed and we are three against one and armed. Once more, do you reject our terms?

MANFROY. I have no words to speak what I feel.

PASIMUNDA. Once more, and for the last time, do you reject our offer? We are patient, we have no need to make terms with you.

There is a loud knocking at the door, and the DUKE enters with a crowd of armed men.

The Duke! we are betrayed. Manfroy has sold us.

DUKE. Here are the traitors. Your plot has failed. Ormisda, here is your letter to the King of Sparta, and here is his written word to you. Beritola, your name is written here, and yours, too, Pasimunda. The band of cut-throats whom you brought hither for your purpose are in gaol and busy at confession. If you would speak, be brief.

PASIMUNDA. It is true that we are guilty, and our defence is this: we were not the authors of the plot, we followed an insidious lead, but we imagined no treachery.

DUKE. Who was the leader?

PASIMUNDA. Manfroy.

ORMISDA. Manfroy.

BERITOLA. Manfroy.

PASIMUNDA. A moment ago when you, sire, knocked at the door, Manfroy was expounding the conditions of our new service under the King of Sparta.

DUKE. Manfroy, it is your turn to speak.

MANFROY. My Liege, what can I say but that I am innocent of this wickedness? I never have been untrue by word or deed or thought; I have served you with all my might; let them do their worst to make the white look black! No threats of death shall compel me to say the thing which is not, nor to plead guilt. I am innocent.

PASIMUNDA. Hark to the hypocrite! How well he counselled me yesterday to cloak beneath a love adventure my embassy to Sparta.

BERITOLA. His treachery so shamed his wife, when she discovered it by chance last night she left her home and child for ever.

Enter DIMITRIUS.

DIMITRIUS. Sire, the servants of these gentlemen, whom we lately caught red-handed here, have spoken, and have of their free will confessed, without the need of a more sharp persuasion, that Manfroy is the leader of this plot; Beritola, Ormisda, and the rest but puppets in the game. Manfroy's purpose was to seize the throne himself; a double traitor both to you and to Sparta.

DUKE. And these accuse him. Have you no more to say, Manfroy?

MANFROY. No more, my lord.

DUKE. I promise you a fair trial. I would sooner deem myself the culprit than you, Manfroy. Justice shall be done. Lead them away.

PASIMUNDA. Dimitrius, you have turned informer and betrayed your friends, I pray the Duke will dole you a yearly pension; thirty pieces of silver is the sum, still the same price, Dimitrius.

DUKE [*to the Guards*]. Lead these men to prison. Come, Dimitrius.

END OF ACT II.

ACT III.

SCENE I.

CYPRUS, *a quay.* *A party of SLAVES are unloading the cargo of a galley which is lying alongside of the quay. Among the SLAVES is MANFROY, who is now a galley-slave. SLAVES sing.*

We're chained to the seats, where we sit and row,
With hey, with ho, four and five in a row.
On a plank between us the taskmen go ;
Stript to the girdle and shaven close are we.

"Work, you ear-boréd curs," they cry,
With hey, with ho, four and five in a row ;
And some are faint at the oar and die,
Stript to the girdle and whipt upon the sea.
And the dead are cast like dogs from the ship,
With hey, with ho, four and five in a row ;
And the living are beat with a bull's-hide whip,
Stript to the girdle on the coast of Barbary.

O you at home who in dalliance waste,
With hey, with ho, four and five in a row ;
O think of the bitter woes we taste,
Stript to the girdle for war upon the sea.

O Christian princes, our Christian peers,
With hey, with ho, four and five in a row
O give us charity, give us tears,
Stript to the girdle and naked to the knee.

Enter EVANDER and MARATO.

EVANDER. You mark those slaves that sing as they discharge
The cargo from that argosy?

MARATO. I mark them.

EVANDER. Beyond that galley do you mark a ship?

MARATO. I mark it.

EVANDER. She was sent by the Duke of Athens
To fetch the beautiful Alathiel,
The daughter of the King of Babylon,
Affianced to the Prince of Algarvé,
His kinsman.

MARATO. Is Alathiel beautiful?

EVANDER. Yes, she is more than mortal, like a spirit ;
She shines and dims the bright world with eclipse ;
Marato, she must be mine, or I shall die !

MARATO. How shall you win her, my lord?

EVANDER.

The Duke of Athens
Has sent his favourite, Dimitrius,
In his own galley to escort her home ;
Now mark the slaves unloading the first vessel ;
Their looks are ruffianly, their plight is evil,
They sweat, they groan, they toil in clanking chains,
No sooner faint than whipt for loitering ;
Amongst them must be many remorseless men.
If we suborn, say, two or three, to seize
Alathiel and to kill Dimitrius,
I'll sail with her to Alexandria.

MARATO. Where is she now!

EVANDER. Close guarded in a castle ;
Dimitrius conceals her till they sail.
He is a wily Greek and knows no passion ;
He hopes to bring her safe to Greece and reap
A rich reward.

MARATO. We'll buy the galley's captain.
He will provide three villains.

EVANDER. But we need
A man with brains to think and to command.
Let us approach the captain.

To one of the SLAVES. Hither, slave,
Go to your captain. Tell him that Lord Evander
Would speak with him.

Exit SLAVE.

Marato, had you seen
Alathiel the morning she stepped forth
From the trim vessel to the gaping port,
You would have thought celestial Aphrodite
Had just arisen from the ruffled wave
To put to shame the colours of the dawn.
She must be mine, Marato, or I die!

Enter NICOSTRATUS, captain of the galley.

Your galley that, and those your galley slaves?

NICOSTRATUS. Ay, ay, my lord.

EVANDER. Have you four slaves for sale?

NICOSTRATUS. I have not one, my lord, I would not barter
Willingly for a price.

EVANDER. I'll pay on the nail,
But for my gold I need audacious men,
Well-fitted for a desperate enterprise;
I need four harden'd, merciless, rope-ripe villains.

NICOSTRATUS. I have a galley-full. My lord, observe them;
Look at the scars that seam their sun-tanned backs,
Their swelling sinews and their brawny shoulders;
And mark the murderous message of their eyes.
The life of galley-slaves upon the sea
Is a poor school for scruple.

EVANDER.

So far, good.

But of these four tried ruffians I would buy,
One must be more than a mere hulk of muscle,
With more than lust of murder in his brain.
My enterprise needs thought, resource and skill,
I need a nimble brain, a dexterous hand,
A leader who can reason and be cool.
I doubt if you have such a man.

NICOSTRATUS.

My lord,

I have the man you need, but the price is high.

EVANDER.

I'll offer treble the price of a common slave.
What is this man?

NICOSTRATUS.

His name is Manto. Thus

They called him when they sold him me at Samos.
According to the gossip of the port,
A noble, charged with treason to the state,
In Syracuse, or haply Famagusta;
He and his fellows were condemned to die,
And hanged they were, except this very Manto;
His life was spared; some said his guilt was
doubtful.

Some said his king, remembering his service,
Saved him. Whatever the truth, they let him live
But sentenced him to the galleys; he was sold
And bought again, I purchased him at Samos.
He proved himself quick-witted and resourceful,
And so his price is high.

EVANDER.

Now summon him.

Marato, lead the captain to my house,
And bid the steward pay the needful sum.
The men must be at my door at set of sun.
Now, where's this man.

NICOSTRATUS. Manto! My lord, my thanks.

Enter MANFROY, now MANTO. Exeunt NICOSTRATUS and MARATO.

EVANDER. Hark to me, slave. I have bought you from your master. I have a task for you to tackle and if you succeed in its execution you shall be free.

MANFROY. What task, my lord?

EVANDER. They say you have more wits than a common slave.

MANFROY. I know not, sir.

EVANDER. Well, let that be. Your captain sold you for your wits. I need them for secret business which you shall captain. Three of your fellow-slaves shall take your orders.

MANFROY. What is the task, my lord?

EVANDER. The Duke of Athens has sent his favourite, by name Dimitrius, to bring Princess Alathiel to Athens. She is affianced to the Duke's cousin. Dimitrius guards the damsel in his house. They sail to-morrow. This is not to be. To-night you and my underlings shall raid the castle, masked, where the Greek guards his pearl, and capture her. No obstacle must impede you. If Dimitrius offers resistance, you must defeat him and slay him. I fear the man, he is cunning; but you will take him unawares; yet you must be cautious. I leave the tactics to you. You must by guile or bribery (and I'll provide the funds) enter the house to-night and overpower and kill Dimitrius. The rest is easy. My ship shall be ready in the bay; you shall bring the Princess thither and I shall sail for Alexandria.

MANFROY. I thank you, Sir, but I cannot.

EVANDER. Your recompense is freedom, slave, and gold to start your life anew.

MANFROY. I thank you humbly, but I cannot.

EVANDER. But I have bought you, slave.

MANFROY. My body, sir, but not my soul.

EVANDER. What kind of slave are you to speak of souls?

MANFROY. What kind of noble are you to speak of murder?

EVANDER. You know the powers of masters over slaves?

MANFROY. Your threats are uneffectual as chaff to men like me. The worst you can inflict is death, and death can only be a boon. Slay me or flay me, I will not do this thing.

EVANDER. But you will be free. Is the life on board a galley so sweet that freedom is of no account?

MANFROY. I bear the marks of bondage on my body, but not upon my spirit.

EVANDER. Dimitrius is a rogue, and if you kill him you will but be ridding the world of a ruffian.

MANFROY. If you would rid the world of him, kill him yourself. I shall not.

EVANDER. I give you until noontide to reflect, and after that, friend, it will be too late.

Exit EVANDER. Enter NICOSTRATUS.

NICOSTRATUS. Well, friend, I've sold you for a good sum and you are free.

MANFROY. Sir, did the noble tell you why he needs my services?

NICOSTRATUS. No, Manto, and I asked him no question. In cases where a noble needs the help of ruffians for a secret enterprise, it is prudent to know less than more.

MANFROY. But if the enterprise is of a kind to breed the chastisement of all abettors direct and indirect, it may be prudent to know more than less.

NICOSTRATUS. What's done is done.

MANFROY. Sir, let me make the matter plain. That noble said he'd bought my services; freedom was to be the price of my success; I refused to touch his enterprise.

NICOSTRATUS. Have you lost your wits?

MANFROY. His enterprise was this: to kill Dimitrius, the favourite

of the Duke of Athens, to carry away Alathiel, the daughter of the King of Babylon, who is affianced to the Duke's kinsman.

NICOSTRATUS. I'll give him back his gold ; such a task must have an aftermath. We should never find anchorage again in Italy or Greece ; your word shall not go unrewarded. I'll take Evander his money bags ; we'll scotch the plot ! Princess Alathiel ! Good saints defend us ! What a peril have I escaped from, Manto !

Exit NICOSTRATUS. Enter the FRIAR.

FRIAR. Hail to thee, Manfroy, great and brave.

MANFROY. Manto, you mean ; I know no other name.

I am a galley slave.

FRIAR. Hast thou forgot the morn I came ?

It was thy festival ;

No gift I brought,

But I besought

A gift for God of thee,

Thy soul for all eternity.

Dost thou recall ?

MANFROY. I call to mind

Your words and what I answered you ;

You promised evil fortune and unkind ;

Your prophecy came true ;

My worldly goods were wrecked at sea,

The wife I loved abandoned me,

And by my nearest friends betrayed,

By treachery,

I fell into the trap they laid ;

I lost my fame,

And my good name ;

I lost the faith and favour of my lord ;

And though his heart acquitted me,

He spoke the sentence, but he stayed the sword,

And gave instead captivity ;
And I was bought and sold
For silver and for gold ;
And now I am a slave upon the sea ;
Stript to the girdle and shaven close are we
With hey, with ho,
We sit five in a row ;
On a plank between us the taskmen go ;
And our bare backs bleed.
Have I had my meed ?

FRIAR.

Is the medicine sour enough for me,
Stript to the girdle for war upon the sea ?
Now in the loneliness
Of thy distress,
Canst thou not hear,
Tranquil and clear,
The voice of God that bids thee come to Him ?

MANFROY.

Empty and mute is the large world to me ;
I know that far beyond us veiled and dim,
Blind destiny
Works her unchanging will,
And in her unrelenting mill
She grinds our lives ; I curse her not, nor bless.

FRIAR.

And yet thy soul's recess,
Sifted by sacrifice,
Re-echoes to the song of paradise.

MANFROY.

My soul has shed the trappings of pretence ;
I disbelieve in Providence,
And more than ever now in God's paternity.
If I believed such things could be,
I should despise, defy, detest
Your monstrous God, a devil manifest,

A father unfathered and a judge unjust ;
But in my gods I put my trust.
My gods, good friar, they sustain
My soul in grief and pain ;
The ancient pagan creed
Fulfil my need.
The god of war : I venerate his spear ;
The god of wealth : his ducats I revere ;
The god of wine : he answers my appeal ;
The god of love : I dread his whistling steel ;
The god of courage : he sustaineth me
In mine extremity
To bear my life accurst,
Although the elements may do their worst,
Though man surpass them in their cruelty.

FRIAR. Why use so many words to say, my son,
A simple thing ; God ? there is only One ;
Him you adore,
Albeit by a score
Of names.

MANFROY. There is no God for me but man,
And symbols man hath made ;
Man is a glow-worm, and his little flames
No sooner are enkindled than they fade ;
Briefer than summer evening is his span,
And afterwards the nothingness, the night.

FRIAR Then why refuse to buy
Deliverance from thy horrid plight
By killing thy old enemy ?

MANFROY. Oh angling friars, you, each and all alike,
Stand rod in hand prepared to strike ;
You listen at each chink and hole,

You watch for secrets and you wait
To catch our confidence for bait
Wherewith to hook the soul.

FRIAR. I listened not to thee, my son,
With God I held communion.

MANFROY. Now you would take away
My last poor morsel of felicity :
My undefeated constancy ;
Once and for all, I do not need
Your God, your prayers, your cruel creed.

FRIAR. Farewell. I shall return again,
I have your promised word.

MANFROY. Amen.

Exit MANFROY.

SCENE II.

Outside a brigands' cave in Greece. Enter MANFROY.

MANFROY. Here in a cave of outlaws, I am happy,
Living on humble fare, with leaves for bed,
And for companionship a band of brigands ;
They are the truest friends that I have known
Save two : Chichibio and Lysimachus,
A pedant and a jester. Here I sit,
And watch the goats upon the mountain side,
And listen to the tuneful grasshoppers,
And a great peace enwraps me. Holy friar,
You should be here ; I need no cloistered walls.
All nature shall be my Basilica :
The sea my chanting choir, the mountain tops

The pillars of the aisle, the evening star
My taper, and the sun and moon my censers,
Swinging the fragrant scents of eve and dawn.
My prayer the wordless fellowship I feel
With nature's ministers and with the hearts
Of my rude hosts. May nothing come to mar
The harmony of my contentedness!

Enter GRACCHO, a brigand.

GRACCHO. Manto, we have good news for you.

MANFROY. Tell me your news.

GRACCHO. The saints have been propitious and sent us a windfall.
We have made a capture worth a kingdom.

MANFROY. What is the prize?

GRACCHO. None other than Princess Alathiel, affianced to the cousin of the Duke; she sailed not long ago from Cyprus. The ship was driven astray by the same tempest that destroyed your galley. At last they made a bay and beached their ship. Thence they set out for Athens, without the guards who were awaiting them at the Piraeus. An ally brought us warning, and our men met them in a defile, not three leagues hence. The captain of the escort took to his heels. They have already reached the secret path. I ran hither to make preparation. Manto, she is like a holy image; I thought her more than a mortal as she came, riding daintily upon her mule; hark, I hear them.

Enter PISARIO and ALATHIEL.

PISARIO. Fair lady, we shall change our cavern to a bower meet for your beauty. We have a guest here already, a traveller, shipwrecked on our inhospitable coast. Manto, this is Princess Alathiel; I pray you to attend to her wants.

Exeunt PISARIO and GRACCHO.

MANFROY. They spoke the truth, but far beneath the truth—
She is a spirit from the shadowy world,
Where the dethroned deities abide.
O lady you have dazzled my weak sense.
Are you indeed a mortal or a dream?
I lately suffered shipwreck. That was the least
Of many troubles upon land and sea.
Perchance I lost my wits. For now, before me,
I seem to see the daughter of the foam,
She who was charioted by turtle-doves
To the isles of the happy sea.

ALATHIEL. I am Alathiel,
The daughter of the King of Babylon,
To Algarvé betrothed. Dimitrius
Fetched me from Cyprus, but in midmost ocean
We met with tempest and unfavouring winds
That drove us to an unfrequented bay,
And there we beached our ship; thence on a mule
I started with Dimitrius for Athens.
We were waylaid by brigands, and Dimitrius
Escaped and left me to my fortune, sir.
So far the brigands have dealt kindly by me,
Nor do I think that I shall suffer harm,
For I have asked Our Blessed Lady's aid.
The brigands promise to send men to Athens,
To fetch a ransom for my liberty.

MANFROY. A kingdom were too poor a ransom.

ALATHIEL. Sir,
How came you hither?

MANFROY. I was a noble once,
At that same court of Athens I enjoyed
The favour of the Duke; that same Dimitrius,

Who left you in your need, betrayed me there,
And caught me in a web of treachery.
I was condemned to labour in a galley,
Until a merciful shipwreck set me free.
They call me Manto, but my name is Manfroy.
Will you return to Athens?

ALATHIEL.

MANFROY.

Till this hour

I was contented in my loneliness,
Happy to sojourn in a wattled hut
Alone with the sweet solitude of nature.
But now I seem to suffer a wondrous change ;
I am no more what I was yesterday,
My soul is mazed in dream, a derelict ship ;
I crave your pardon, I am as one demented.

Enter PISARIO.

PISARIO. Our supper is prepared.

SCENE III.

Outside the cave. Enter MANFROY.

MANFROY. The sinking sun the mountain tops has kissed ;
They glow like amethyst ;
The quiet sea grows dim,
And far away upon its blazing rim
Shines the white canvas of an argosy ;
Haply she hails from isles unvisited
Or from the solemn harbours of the dead ;
From Tyre or Carthage or forgotten Troy,
Or from the fields of joy ;
The orchards of Hesperides ;

The jewels of unfooted seas.
Maybe she is the ship that bore the spoil,
The price of unimaginable toil,
Robbed from the Colchian shore
By wise Medea's lore.
Perchance a phantom galley bringing home
Ulysses freed at last from wind and foam ;
Perchance the ship that bore
Unhappy Helen to her native shore ;
Helen the matchless, faithless bride,
For whom the old and young ungrudging died ;
She never died, she wanders still
Here, on this flowery hill.
She has been born again, or else her ghost
Has sought this coast
To rob me of my rest.

Enter ALATHIEL.

See in the golden west
How royal is her tread ;
How like a dewy flower her nodding head !
She comes this way,
Outsweetening the last breath of dying day.
Princess Alathiel, hail !

ALATHIEL. Good sir, your cheek is pale.

MANFROY. I am still weary after troubled days ;
My mind is clouded with a haze.

ALATHIEL. Pisario, the chief,
Has sent for gold to ransom me,
And soon I shall be free.

MANFROY. The journey is but brief.
In three days time he should be here once more.

- ALATHIEL. And then, farewell for ever to this shore.
- MANFROY. For ever. I remain behind.
- ALATHIEL. Your services shall fade not from my mind.
- MANFROY. O look afar,
 The evening star!
 Its rays are trembling in the sleepy sea ;
 One lonely tree
 Is black against the silver sky.
 Beauty must die,
 The glory of the world must pass away ;
 Another many-coloured day
 Has shone and died ;
 And now the world grows grey,
 And dark the countryside ;
 The night with stars and dew
 Descends and blesses you ;
 To her more dear than any star or moon,
 Softer than springtide's tune,
 Bewitching as a dream,
 And brighter than the gleam
 Of ravelled skeins of foam.
 My fevered fancies roam,
 I know not what I say.
- ALATHIEL. To-morrow is the very first of May.
- MANFROY. You shall be empress of that festival,
 And wear a coronal
 Of lilies wild and roses red,
 Upon your queenly head ;
 And many a slave
 Shall change your humble cave
 Into a festal bower.
- ALATHIEL. I hail this quiet hour ;

The shepherd leads his flocks to rest,
And though the grass still shines like sombre gold,
And woolly cattle glimmer white and cold,
It is too dark to see
The shepherd. Hark !
A bird !

Her voice has stirred
The rustling leaves of yonder tree.

MANFROY.

It is a downy owl
With hooded cowl,
Hooting his plaintive note.

ALATHIEL.

And from the valleys float
Echoes of song.

MANFROY.

Oh ! Youth is brief and sorrow overlong.

ALATHIEL.

Look, in the fields below the fireflies light
Their lamps ; they glisten thick and bright.

MANFROY.

Brief is the summer night
And sick at heart am I.

ALATHIEL.

Why so, my lord ? The world is fair,
All nature is at peace ;
And now the dying daylight breathes a prayer
For night's divine release.

MANFROY.

But I am sick at heart.

ALATHIEL.

My lord, why so ?

MANFROY.

I hear the stealthy hour when we must part.

ALATHIEL.

I am not loath to go,
Yet loath to leave my friends behind ;
You, sir, who proved so chivalrous and kind,
My comfort in distress,
My heart is full of thankfulness.
I shall not soon forget
Your goodness, noble lord.

MANFROY. Would we had never met.
Each word you speak
Has pierced me like a sword ;
The spirit fails me and the flesh is weak ;
Since you have filled my firmament,
Most holy and most excellent,
And dazzled me with sorcery,
I drift on a delirious sea.
Sail, sail away with me
To isles of bliss
Or blue Neapolis ;
Across untrampled seas,
To the Hesperides ;
And I will be your captain and your guide ;
Your lord, your lover and your knight ;
And you shall be my bride,
My holy joy, my good delight ;
Ah ! I will serve you well,
Divine Alathiel.

ALATHIEL. Sir, it is haply true
That toil, mishap and pain
Have sorely shaken you
And troubled your sick brain.
I am Alathiel,
The true affianced bride
Of Algarvé, you know it well ;
I have no thoughts for any one beside.
Your words have vexed me sore.
I pray you, sir, to trouble me no more.

MANFROY. My words were born of ecstasy,
Forgive me, most divine princess,
And pity my distress,

But let me still thy servant be,
In mute humility.
I vow henceforth you need not fear
One vexing word to hear.
Forgive me, proud Princess Alathiel.

ALATHIEL. It is forgotten, sir, good-night. Farewell.

SCENE IV

Outside the brigands' cave. Enter MANFROY.

MANFROY. I cannot sleep, nor eat. All day, all night,
One never-resting thought tormenteth me,
Alathiel, Alathiel, I am faint
With unassuaged and unavailing fire.
Am I that Manfroy who once laughed to scorn
The petty passions of mortality?

Enter ALATHIEL.

ALATHIEL. Lord Manfroy.

MANFROY. Lady, I listen.

ALATHIEL. The days go by, and still there is no news from Athens;
have they sent trustworthy messengers? I am fretting to be free.

MANFROY. Alathiel, you shall be free.

ALATHIEL. But how, my lord?

MANFROY. Come to my cavern to-night at the fall of night.
I will show you a path that leads out of this fastness, and guide you
to the plain, and conduct you, if you will, to Athens; or choose
you a sure guide if you mistrust me.

ALATHIEL. I will come.

MANFROY. Wait till the brigands sleep. I'll charge their wine with
herbs and they shall sleep soundly. At nightfall steal from your

cave, the guard who watches it will not stir, and softly come to my hut. All shall be ready.

ALATHIEL. You know the road to Athens?

MANFROY. I know the road.

ALATHIEL. And you will be my guide?

MANFROY. I will be your guide.

ALATHIEL. I trust you, sir, you bear the hall-mark of nobility, and you have acted graciously; Lord Manfroy, I commit my fortune to you.

SCENE V.

MANFROY'S hut. Night. A kettle is boiling on the fire. MANFROY pours out wine into two goblets.

MANFROY. The night is cold and mists are in the valley,
But warm shall be the wine of our stirrup-cup.

He pours water from the kettle into the goblets.

This cauldron came from hell.

He pours drops from a vial into one of the goblets.

Here's myrrh and spice

And herbs to sweeten the oblivious brew.

He fetches another vial.

Queen Proserpine, you tasted of such stuff
When bid to banquet with the lord of Night.

Enter ALATHIEL.

ALATHIEL. They are sleeping sound. The sentinel never stirred.

MANFROY. The moon is rising under yonder hill,
She sends her halo as a harbinger
Before her, and a silver mist for message.
We will await her sign.

ALATHIEL.

The night is cold.

I took this mantle lent me by the brigands
For bedding, to enwrap me. But I shiver.

MANFROY.

I have prepared a steaming stirrup-cup.

ALATHIEL.

I will drink boldly to a happy fortune.

MANFROY *gives her one goblet and takes one himself. He
drinks his.*

MANFROY.

Here's to our journey.

ALATHIEL.

And to your former fortunes.

She drinks.

Let me rest one brief moment ere we start,
My head is dizzy from the mead.

MANFROY.

Princess,

You have not once beheld your promised prince ?

ALATHIEL.

Only his painted features. They are fair ;

MANFROY.

He must indeed be noble to deserve you.

ALATHIEL.

The moon has risen. Let—

MANFROY.

Alathiel,

I can no more. My heart has burst its bonds.
I love you more than any beardless princeling
Can ever love you, and with the vehement passion
Of a young heart grown old untimely and wise,
In pain, in sorrow, and calamity,
And hardship and sharp traffic with the world ;
I love you with the unsated fires of youth,
And the full plenitude of ripened manhood ;
I love you with the fury of a god,
I love you with my fond mortality ;
I love you, O my dream, my joy.

ALATHIEL.

My lord,

I trusted you. Now you have played me false ;
I can no longer trust you for a guide.

MANFROY. You shall not go.

ALATHIEL. I shall cry out for succour,

Oh, what is this? I fall, I . . .

She falls back unconscious.

MANFROY. Sleep, Alathiel,

O, sleep, sweet empress of my trackless love,

My life, my death, my all-the-world, my heaven,

My bride, my mistress, my bright paramour.

SCENE VI.

Outside the brigands' hut. Enter MANFROY.

MANFROY. Soon shall the dawn's cold hand disperse the clouds
That throng the levee of the kingly sun ;
A thousand birds shall hail another day,
And husbandmen go whistling to the fields,
And herdsmen to the pastures lead their flocks,
The hunter seek his prey, the brigand, booty,
And all shall be the same as yesterday.
Yet nothing in the world shall be the same,
Nor ever be as if this had not been.
I wrapped her in her mantle and I bore her
Across the limbs of snoring sentinels
And laid her on the couch ; she has not stirred.
When the triumphant sun arouses her,
What will she take for truth and what for dream ?

Enter ALATHIEL.

ALATHIEL. Lord Manfroy, I am late ; see, it is dawn ;
My head is heavy ; I have slept too long.
I dreamt. I know not what ; but hideous dreams

Pursued me in my sleep. My head is dizzy;
My lord, is it too late?

MANFROY.

It is too late.

ALATHIEL.

But why? The brigands sleep.

MANFROY.

It is too late.

ALATHIEL.

Come, let us risk the venture.

MANFROY.

You must stay,

For ever with me now, Alathiel.

ALATHIEL.

My lord, why do you look so wistfully?
Look, the first gleam of sunrise through the mist
Kisses the mountains and the smiling sea;
The vapours in my brain begin to melt;
Surely I sought you in your hut last night,
You gave me wine; we drank a stirrup-cup;
And drank the fortune of our enterprise,
And then . . . And then you spoke intemperate
words;
And I rebuked you; but that is past and done with;
That was the dream of night; the wine betrayed you;
But now the dawn comes and the seas are still;
Now the calm sun lights up the sober world,
And we must leave this place.

MANFROY.

It is too late.

Too late, for you are mine for ever and ever;
I am your husband and you are my bride;
Mine; no one else's; mine for better or worse.
I drugged the stirrup-cup you drank last night;
And unresisting you obeyed my call
To paradise. It is too late to go;
Too late to seek your lord of yesterday;
I am your lord, your husband; you are mine;
My paramour, my mistress, and my wife,

To-day, to-morrow, and for ever.

ALATHIEL.

O day,

Hide thy bright face and look not on my shame ;
Good saints and angels, weep for me in heaven,
For on this earth I shall not weep again.
Sweet Mother of God, have mercy on thy child,
Blot out the horrid vestige of this dream ;
Let heaven remember, but let me forget.
His deed shall be recorded and requited,
I know, and haply by God's grace forgiven ;
May God forgive him, but let me forget.
They say forgiveness blossoms in the heart,
And once upon a time I had a heart,
But now where it should beat there is no sound.
Sweet Mother, take me to thy tranquil heart ;
Let me find refuge in a nunnery,
Where I can live for ever on my knees ;
Forgotten of others but by thee remembered,
Forgetful of aught else remembering thee,
Until I shall not mind remembrance more ;
Until my heart, now mute as any stone,
Shall say as easily as babbling lips,
" As we forgive the trespass done to us,"
And pitiful, I shall deserve God's pity.

Enter PISARIO and GRACCHO.

PISARIO. Hark to our news from the city. Graccho has returned with the ransom, and we will lead Princess Alathiel to Athens. And for you, Manto, there is great news. You are no more Manto, but Lord Manfroy. Dimitrius, accused not only of deserting the Princess, but of further crimes, which were attested by many witnesses, was sentenced to death, and confessed before he died

the injury he had done to you. You are pardoned and restored to favour; the Duke awaits your coming. The city is preparing to welcome you, and the young bridegroom is awaiting his lovely bride.

ALATHIEL. I pray you to guide me, sirs, to Athens without delay, and, when we reach our goal, we will go unobserved into the city, for I have business in a nunnery, where the Abbess awaits me. I am ready; you have been good to me, nor will you refuse this, the last favour that I ask of you.

END OF ACT III.

ACT IV.

SCENE I.

A room in DIANORA'S house, Athens. Enter CALISTA and LUSCA.

CALISTA. He said he would be here ere set the sun.

LUSCA. The sun has almost set ; the Parthenon
Is smouldering like a funeral pyre, a ghost
Of gold against the purple hill ; the coast
Is dark as wine above the blazing sea.

CALISTA. Sing me the song of my felicity ;
The Queen of Heaven has heard my orison
And granted me the love of Palamon.

LUSCA *sings.*

In a pearly shell across the sea
The Queen of Love came sailing ;
Her golden tresses down to her knee
Were fluttering and trailing.
The summer met her by the brine,
And gave her a crimson kirtle ;
With cornflowers wrought and eglantine,
And a crown of fragrant myrtle.
He wrapped her in an azure hood,
To shield her from the weather ;
He lead her through a cypress wood
To a house in the thyme and the heather.
The house is shining in the trees,
And there she dwells in beauty ;
Go down, good people, on your knees,
And pay to her your duty.

Enter PALAMON. Exit LUSCA.

PALAMON. I bring you roses white and roses red,
To crown your queenly head.

CALISTA. It is the first of May.

PALAMON. Our festival, our happy holiday,
O hearken to your heart and grant to me
My long-sought, long-denied felicity ;
Grant me to-day your hand, and be my promised
wife.

CALISTA. I love you, Palamon, I pledge to you
Eternal love ; I will be fond and true,
Your faithful wife,
While God shall grant me life ;
And I know truly that you love me well.

PALAMON. O heart of mine,
O rose divine,
Was ever blossom of an April bough
So wondrous as that peerless brow ?
Were ever stars in evening skies
As holy as those eyes ?
With more than adoration I adore you ;
In ecstasy and fear I kneel before you ;
I will defend you with my sword,
And make you proud and famous and adored,
And lift you on the pinions of my fame ;
And like a jewel you shall wear my name ;
My deeds shall be a carpet for your feet,
And God shall lift me in the eyes of men,
And give me valour, and the strength of ten ;
Wisdom and might and glory and renown
To make for you an honourable crown ;
My fortitude, my faith, my strength, my trust,

Shall never rust ;
So long as you shall be my banner bright,
And shine before me and guide me day and night.
CALISTA. And I will love and guard you, Palamon ;
With tireless orison,
And hourly prayer,
That shall ascend the high celestial stair,
And find a place
In the bright house of Grace ;
The Queen of Heaven shall look kindly down,
No saints shall frown,
But each shall smile and bless
Our hallowed happiness.
We shall be joined in bliss most meet, most
bright,
In heaven's sight ;
Our joy shall be most good, most fair, most true ;
If you love me as I can but love you.
PALAMON. And I shall love you thus, and there shall be
No I, no you, but one felicity.
CALISTA. Amen. God's blessings upon you and me.

SCENE II.

A hall in the house of MANFROY, Duke of Athens. A high-pillared open loggia at the back opens on to the street. On the other side of the street is a Byzantine church. Enter MANFROY, CHICHIBIO, LYSIMACHUS.

MANFROY. My son, Palamon, is to speak with me presently on a matter of moment to himself. May no disaster be about to fall on us.

LYSIMACHUS. You need fear nothing from that quarter, my lord ;

during your exile I took care of him. He proved a willing pupil ; full of spirit and made after the pattern of his father.

MANFROY. Do not say that, Lysimachus.

LYSIMACHUS. What nobler pattern could there be ?

MANFROY. May his life be more even in fortune than mine has been. Yet, in spite of all, my life, Lysimachus, has not been an unhappy one.

CHICHIBIO. Call no man married till he's wed,

Call no man happy till he's dead.

MANFROY. You think, fool, that my tale of misfortune has not yet been told.

CHICHIBIO. Life is like a voyage in a leaking ship ; the sea remains unstable and the vessel in hourly jeopardy, until she makes the only safe harbour, whose name is death.

MANFROY. Let us forget myself and talk of Palamon. He has had a happy youth.

LYSIMACHUS. And a studious ; and since, my lord, you were chosen to be Duke of Athens, he has increased in dignity without becoming arrogant.

MANFROY. What is this business of moment ?

CHICHIBIO. To the young there is only one thing of moment, and that is love ; the bitter-sweet, the eternal lie.

MANFROY. So far he has been fancy-free.

LYSIMACHUS. Palamon conceals behind a quiet mask a world of passion. Not that he is deceitful ; but, like his father, he curbs his passions and controls his appetites ; and he delights in the lordship of the spirit over the flesh.

MANFROY. Has he never loved ?

CHICHIBIO. I would wager he does now.

MANFROY. Why now ?

CHICHIBIO. Because yesterday he showed me a sonnet and asked me if it was well turned.

MANFROY. And how was it?

CHICHIBIO. It was the matter more than the manner of it that caught my attention. I will repeat it:—

I saw you shepherding a flock of flowers,
Alone in the May morning and the dew.
When dawn discrowned had crowned the East with blue,
To thee the spring surrendered her sweet powers.
A host of viewless angels seemed to tread
Before thee and behind thee ; all the air
Was full of whispering chimes ; and praise and prayer,
Like petals blown, beneath thy feet were spread.
You were unconscious of your empery,
Nor knew that holy rapture round you breathed ;
The heavens their azure smile to you bequeathed.
And you did rob her laughter from the sea ;
And benediction from beyond the skies
Streamed from the downward daybreak of your eyes.

MANFROY. Who is the object of his dreams?

CHICHIBIO. I have journeyed far and wide, but never in wayfaring have I ever met with a paragon whom verse like this would befit but twice. The first time was seventeen years ago, some weeks before your return. I was walking homewards at dawn after a night of revel, and met with a cavalcade which entered the city before the first marketers. Three cloaked men escorted a lady riding a mule. They stopped me, and asked me the way to the nunnery, and I led them to the Convent of St. Syncretica. As I turned to go the lady dropped her hood, and I beheld the most celestial, the saddest of faces ; a face that was the shadow of a spirit ; pure as blossom against the sky, yet mournful with a sorrow too sad for words, and too proud for tears. I cried out in surprise: "O lady, who are you? What angel have I been escorting?" And the lady said, "I was once

Alathiel, daughter of the King of Babylon, but now I go to seek a new name."

LYSIMACHUS. Was it the same Alathiel who was betrothed to the Prince of Algarvé and captured by brigands?

CHICHIBIO. The same. Dimitrius abandoned her or sold her to the brigands. Her ransom was paid and the brigands brought her to Athens, but she entered a nunnery and never set eyes on her betrothed.

MANFROY. Why?

CHICHIBIO. Doubtless she had seen enough of men and all their works.

MANFROY. And now does she still live?

CHICHIBIO. I heard it said she died some years ago. But dead or alive she is immured in a grave.

MANFROY. And has another such marvel stolen the heart of Palamon?

CHICHIBIO. It is only from the past that the future is fashioned, my lord. The past never dies.

MANFROY. But is there another such marvel? You said you had twice beheld a vision.

CHICHIBIO. The second time was but a few days ago. In the evening, down a by-way, under a wall beyond which is the garden of some lord or lady, I know not who, I heard a voice singing. The soul that speaks with such a voice must be beautiful, I thought. I waited in the twilight. The stars came out; a few bats were circling in the dusk. The candles were lit and the stage was set for a vision. Presently, at the corner of the garden, under a tree, I saw a form bending over the wall and looking up into the sky. I crept to the other side of the alley, so as to observe better, and what did I behold? A vision like that I saw in the morning seventeen years ago. It was another Alathiel; as beautiful as her ghost; and yet, it was not her. She had the same beauty, the same purity and yet

not the same; and in this face there was no sadness. My new vision was as bright as the old, but it was another Alathiel, not Alathiel. The new vision was that of a maiden, in the April of her youth; innocent and gay; and as I gazed a cloaked figure approached and she waved to him, and further down the alley he opened with a key a little door in the wall and walked in. Then the vision vanished, and all that I heard in the deepening shadow were whispers like the twitter of two birds.

MANFROY. And who was the man?

CHICHIBIO. I could not see his face.

MANFROY. And who is she?

CHICHIBIO. Who knows? Nature has made another Alathiel.

MANFROY. Leave me, Lysimachus and Chichibio, for I must see my son alone.

Exeunt CHICHIBIO and LYSIMACHUS.

MANFROY. Is it the past that like a raucous bailiff
Is battering at my door with menacing claim,
For arrears of debts unpaid and long since due?
Or is my brain a prey to baseless fear?
The preachers say that sin is paid in pain,
And that the hour of reckoning late or soon,
Must strike. I have discharged my mortal debts,
And my account with Providence is clean;
For I am owed far more than Fate can pay.
I plead "Not guilty," I am innocent
Of meditated malice; not all the tricks
Which Fate and blindfold circumstance can play,
Shall ever force me to remorseful knees.

Enter PALAMON.

MANFROY. My son.

PALAMON. Father, I have news for you.

MANFROY. Speak.

PALAMON. I am betrothed. I beg permission to be wedded.

MANFROY. To whom?

PALAMON. Her name means "most beautiful," "Calista."

MANFROY. Her parentage?

PALAMON. New. She lost her parents in infancy, but found a mother in a lady of Athens, Dianora.

MANFROY. Her age?

PALAMON. She will be seventeen this year.

I saw her first on Easterday, at Mass,
Arrayed in white, her flower-like features veiled.
Bearing a taper in the long procession;
I thought she was an angel or a spirit,
For more than mortal was her loveliness.
And bright with more than mortal sanctity.
And next I saw her leaning in the dusk
Over the high wall of her cloistered garden,
Dreaming and sighing to the evening star;
I thought she was the ghost of some dead Queen,
Some fabulous Princess of Babylon,
Or else Eurydice harped back from hell,
Or proud Antigone or peerless Cressid,
But she was fairer than these pagan ghosts;
Dazzling in unadorned simplicity,
She seemed more like an angel than a maid.

Enter CALISTA. MANFROY falls back in a swoon.

PALAMON. Help, my father is faint, Lysimachus, Chichibio.

MANFROY. It is nothing, Palamon. The heat has overcome me.
Leave me, send me Lysimachus.

CALISTA. Farewell to you, my liege.

PALAMON. Your father. [*Exit CALISTA. Enter LYSIMACHUS.*]
My father is sick. I go to summon a physician.

MANFROY. No, summon no one, I am now quite restored,—but leave me with Lysimachus.

Exit PALAMON.

SCENE III.

A room in a nunnery. MANFROY. *Enter* SISTER MONICA.

MANFROY. I have obeyed your summons, reverend sister. What do you need of me? I am your servant.

SISTER MONICA. Sit down, Lord Duke, and listen. For years I have been cloistered here, secluded from the world, but news of mortal chances pierce from time to time these walls. We heard when Athens chose you Duke, that Manfroy filled the office well; the rumour of his excellence, the praise, reached us; and with it news of Palamon, his son. He, like his father, they said, finds favour in the eyes of men. News reached us yesterday that he was betrothed to Calista, the ward of Dianora.

MANFROY. It is true.

SISTER MONICA. Have you sanctioned this betrothal, sir?

MANFROY. I have sanctioned it.

SISTER MONICA. The news is public?

MANFROY. Proclaimed at court and in the city. The marriage shall be celebrated without delay.

SISTER MONICA. The marriage must not be.

MANFROY. Why not?

SISTER MONICA. You ask me that question?

MANFROY. I know nothing but this; that Palamon loves this maiden. She returns his love; she is meet for him and he for her; her guardian, the Lady Dianora, who has played the part of parent to the orphan child, favours the suit and speeds the marriage.

SISTER MONICA. Look at me well, Manfroy, well and long, and say if this marriage is to be.

MANFROY. Sister, I say this marriage shall be.

SISTER MONICA. The shrunken sister that you see before you, this feeble body, this wasted face, consumed by years of fast and prayer, belonged once to Alathiel, who came from Babylon to Greece to be a bride. Duke, do you recall Alathiel?

MANFROY. I have heard say she died.

SISTER MONICA. Of a broken heart? Her heart was broken, she did not die. They say that she was beautiful. She sailed, you mind, from Cyprus with a Greek, who sold her to brigands. Do you recall what happened to Alathiel, Duke Manfroy?

MANFROY. She was ransomed and set free.

SISTER MONICA. But not before she suffered unspeakable wrong; no brigand did her injury.

MANFROY. What is done is done. Why should ghosts be raised to blight my son?

SISTER MONICA. The past can never die; the children and their children's children must eat of the bitter fruit of a father's sin.

MANFROY. I shall defend my son from these dreams.

SISTER MONICA. Your son is not the only one, Lord Duke, entangled in the past. Alathiel bore a child, a daughter; she was taken to Athens secretly and left upon the doorstep of a childless noblewoman, who received the child and fostered her, and loved her as her own; that child was called Calista.

MANFROY. Now betrothed to Palamon.

SISTER MONICA. Now, knowing what you know and what you knew, what you can but have known, will you allow this marriage?

MANFROY. I allow it.

SISTER MONICA. You sanction this abominable thing?

MANFROY. Abominable to you, but not to me.

SISTER MONICA. You are defying the laws of man as well as the law of God.

MANFROY. I shall obey a greater law than these; the law of nature.

SISTER MONICA. If you refuse to cancel this betrothal, heed; God

will not sanction this accursed thing ; God will prevent it. Do you believe in God ?

MANFROY. No, sister, not in the God to whom you pray ; but I believe in inscrutable fate, in nature's design, in the freedom of the spirit of man, and in the promptings of the heart. I deem the bond that shall unite these two to be as sacred as a union hallowed by the Church.

SISTER MONICA. You know there is a God. You know this marriage must not be, nor is this yet the end. The fruits of your forgotten deed are yet to ripen ; you shall pay the price unto the uttermost and last ; what you did in secret shall be cried upon the housetops to a frightened world. God have mercy upon your soul, Duke Manfroy.

SCENE IV.

A room in the nunnery.

SISTER MONICA. My child, I have most bitter news for you,
And I must break to bits your dearest joy.

CALISTA. I am afraid.

SISTER MONICA. God gives His grace to us
Not in the shape of happiness and joy,
But hidden in a tear.

CALISTA. I am afraid.

SISTER MONICA. Fear not, my child, for you have done no wrong.

CALISTA. He seemed to love me truly.

SISTER MONICA. He loves you still ;
But in this world he never can be yours.

CALISTA. The Duke has taken back his promised word.
I knew I was unmeet to wed the prince ;
I knew that dreams were dreams and would not last !

SISTER MONICA. You were beyond the hopes and dreams of
princes ;
The past, and long-forgotten secret things,
Stand in the way.

CALISTA. Tell me the naked truth.

SISTER MONICA. Your marriage with the Prince can never be,
And you, of your own will, must break your troth,
And cancel it with an eternal No.

CALISTA. I love him.

SISTER MONICA. Child, he loves you more than life.

CALISTA. Then why ?

SISTER MONICA. You see before you a faded nun ;
But once, I too was young, a promised bride,
I was the daughter of a famous king,
And the world sang my beauty. I was pledged
To wed the cousin of the Duke of Athens.
I sailed from orient shores to Greece ; and there
The brigands captured me, and there a nobleman
Did me an unimaginable wrong,
And robbed me of my spotless innocence ;
So hideous was the deed I scarce can bear
To see you apprehend my halting words ;
They cut me to the quick like murderous knives.
Professing to contrive my liberty,
He drugged me, and he worked his evil will. . . .
Then I was ransomed from the brigand band.
I sought for refuge in this nunnery. . . .
And in due time I gave birth to a daughter ;
That child, O my Calista, it was you.

CALISTA. Mother !

SISTER MONICA. I am your mother.

CALISTA. Palamon !

SISTER MONICA. The son of him who did the deed of shame.

CALISTA. The Duke !

SISTER MONICA. The devil entered into him
And found him, after trial and disaster,
All undefended for the sharp assault,
And easily took the empty citadel,
And bade him do irrevocable wrong ;
But this my secret must for ever lie
Hid in the fast-locked casket of our hearts.
You must break troth with Palamon, and he
Must never know the reason.

CALISTA [*kneeling*]. I will obey.

O Queen of Heaven, pray for Palamon.

SISTER MONICA. Pray day and night to God to save your father,
And sometimes say a pitiful prayer for me.

SCENE V.

A hall in MANFROY'S house, as in Scene II. MANFROY is discovered.

MANFROY. The craven quake with superstitious fear
To watch the seed-like cause bear flower and fruit
And men are led by words and hollow phrase
Nor dare they look upon the naked truth,
But I shall boldly drink of the vine I planted,
Deeds and misdeeds, and cull the consequence
As carelessly as any wayside flower.
In spite of all shall Palamon be happy ;
In spite all shall Palamon be wed.

Enter PALAMON.

PALAMON. Father !

MANFROY. My son !

PALAMON. She has abandoned me. She bids me farewell ; she no longer loves me.

MANFROY. My son !

PALAMON. I will unlock my heart to you, father, lest you share her mistake. She thinks because passion made me meek that I shall humbly swallow the affront, but my spirit is proud, and as chance may blow, can be an angel or a fiend. Father, not you, not all the saints shall thwart me. I shall possess Calista, whatever the means ; be it death to her, or death to me, or to us both ; I'll drench my hands in blood ; betray my dearest friends ; sell my honour or my immortal soul.

MANFROY. Peace, Palamon. You say she loves another.

PALAMON. What if she love ten thousand others ? To-night Calista shall be mine.

Exit PALAMON.

MANFROY. The past, the sleepless past (as an enchanter
With wand and muttered incantation calls
A troop of gibbering ghosts) has raised at last
The sleeping sounds and sights of buried years,
And now the father's unsuspected deed
Is born again and blossoms in the child.
I have bequeathed a legacy of evil,
And Fate has made a mirror of my son,
Where I behold the image of dead self.
No, Palamon, I have the strength to eat
Sour fruit and bitter wine ; but you are gentle ;
And such a deed would drag your soul to hell.
I must protect you from your father's sin,
And come what may, this deed must not be done.

END OF ACT IV.

ACT V.

SCENE I.

A room in MANFROY's palace. MANFROY discovered reading. Enter
CLEON.

CLEON. Sir, an old man craves an audience with you.

MANFROY. Is it a friar?

CLEON. A husbandman, sir.

MANFROY. Let him come now.

Enter DURAZZO ; he kneels.

DURAZZO.

Duke, listen to my story,

I am a feeble, grey-haired, sad old man,
Crippled with labour and bowed down with years,
I have grown grey in service, yours, my liege,
And before you, I served two Dukes of Athens,
And they were with my service well content.
I come to plead the cause of my only son,
Gnotho, a youth, a fisherman by trade,
Who owns a little boat in the Piraeus.
As he was making merry with his friends
Last night (one of his comrades had been wed),
There was a marriage-feast and wine and song ;
And afterwards, inflamed by words and wine,
Borne on the flood of reckless holiday,
He climbed into the ducal park and shot
With happy, fatal aim a silver swan,
And brought it back in triumph to the feast ;

But watchful foresters had spied the act,
And followed him and seized him with the spoil.
Before the magistrate, Lysimachus,
To-day he was arraigned ; the law is plain,
The penalty for slaying bird or beast
Within the ducal pleasure-ground is death.
Lysimachus passed sentence on my boy,
And he at dawn to-morrow must be hanged.
I ask your mercy and my son's reprieve.

MANFROY.

Lysimachus is just and even-handed ;
Nor can I cancel what the law decrees.
The law must stand ; for if we tamper with it,
Remove this brick and that, the edifice
Will crumble and fall down, and malefactors
Run riot with impunity.

DURAZZO.

My lord,

My son is young, and free from any malice
Or ill-intent. His is an honest heart ;
Nor was it from the lust of pilfering
He did this hasty deed ; it was a frolic
Born of the merry-making and the feast.
My lord, believe me, he is innocent ;
He is my only son ; the light of my eyes,
My eyes so dim with age, so sore with toil,
The only pillar of my helplessness.
I have but a few years to live, and soon
I shall be sleeping in the cheerless grave.
Leave me my son. Let me not unsupported
And lonely, with no staff, no hand to guide me,
Go groping to the dark. You have a son,
A fair and bright-eyed youth, Prince Palamon ;
He is your only child ; O think, my lord,

What you would feel, if they should come to you,
And tell you that your darling, in the pride
And bloom of his first youthfulness, must die,
And dangle from the gibbet like a dog,
You knowing all the while his innocence.
My liege, if you have ever learnt to spell
The syllables of sorrow in the past,
Or tasted of affliction's bitter bread,
Think of that now ; for in this cruel world
There is no sorrow, no calamity
To match the loss of a beloved son.
I pray you to have mercy on my boy,
Take pity on his old and feeble father,
For if you kill him I shall not survive,
And I in your own service have grown grey.
I cannot cancel and unwrite the law.
But pardon is the privilege of princes.
Yes, had the deed been aimed against my person ;
But this offence, slight though it seems, affects
The city and the state, and not myself,
It falls beneath the commonweal's broad ban,
Which private pardon must not tamper with.
The law must take its course, and you and I
Must yield to its undeviating march.

MANFROY.

DURAZZO.

MANFROY.

SCENE II.

CALISTA'S bedroom. CALISTA discovered lying asleep in a bed behind curtains. Enter PALAMON by a secret door, with a lantern.

PALAMON. Like a remorseless thief at dead of night
I come to consummate a dreadful deed,
To wrest my heart's desire from niggard fate ;
And should the casket yield not to my hand
To force the lock.

He draws the curtains.

Soft, soft, my lady sleeps,
As spotless as a flower in paradise
That angels foster. O celestial guardian,
That standest now between me and my love,
Put up thy dazzling sword and fold thy wings.
She plighted me an everlasting troth,
She is my bride, and I will drive away
The treasonable cloud that came between us.
How like a peaceful effigy she sleeps,
How pure, how pale ! O saints of heaven, how pale !
O merciful God, her hand is cold as the grave !
Calista, hear me, wake ; Calista, wake !
Wake ! It is Palamon who calls to thee !
She stirs not ; she is cold and motionless,
And mute. Not this, my God, not this.

Enter LUSCA.

LUSCA.

My lord,

My lady, yesternight, fell sick of the fever,
That like a sudden tempest struck her down,
And swept and shattered her too fragile body.
It left her like a lily in the spring,

After a hurricane of pelting hail,
Unable to uplift her drooping head ;
Without a word, without a single sign,
Her soul forsook her overwearied frame.
After long hours of burning restlessness,
With the first chill of melancholy dawn,
The fever left her, and Calista slept.
So swift, so unobtrusive was the end,
That I mistook deceitful death for sleep,
And know not when our fair Calista died.
Our mistress, Dianora, is far away
At Corinth ; we have summoned her already
With tidings of the fever. I will light
The tapers round her bed, and presently
The holy nuns shall spend the night in vigil,
And pray for her sweet soul's security.
They have been summoned. Oh ! my lord, she
seemed

So sad, so piteous, when the fever took her,
As though she had no will to fight disease,
No wish to live, but only craved for peace,
As if her soul were glad to steal away,
And leave its all-too-lovely prison house.

PALAMON. Good Lusca, light the tapers, leave me alone,
LUSCA *lights the tapers and goes out.* PALAMON *kneels.*
It was to save me from this mortal crime,
God called her to her native paradise.
Give me the pardon I have not deserved,
For her sweet sake, O God, be merciful.

Enter MANFROY.

MANFROY. My Palamon.

PALAMON [*rising*]. My father !

MANFROY. Why are you here ?

PALAMON. I came to commit a crime.
But I remain to pray. She lies there dead,
She died of fever, or more like she died
Of a broken heart. I scent some hideous plot
To separate Calista from her lover
And snap her lovely life.

MANFROY. There was no plot,
It is the hand of fate. How came you here ?
I met you not below.

PALAMON. Love finds the way.

MANFROY. Make haste to go.

PALAMON. My place is by her bier,
Upon my knees.

MANFROY. There will be time to pray,
To-morrow. I beg you, go.

PALAMON. I must not go.

MANFROY. I ask of you to go.

PALAMON. And leave my bride ?
My fair dead bride ? She needs my company,
For she is lonely in the halls of death.

MANFROY. I swear I have good reason, Palamon,
I entreat you leave this place.

PALAMON. I cannot go—
I shall keep vigil till they bury her,
Oh, she like sunrise shall light up the grave !

MANFROY. I order you, my son, to leave this place.

PALAMON. I will not go. Oh, leave me to my grief.
Your scolding desecrates this holy spot.

MANFROY. I do beseech you, Palamon, to go.

Enter SISTER MONICA.

Too late ! too late !

SISTER MONICA.

I have obeyed your summons,

Lord Duke, and I am here to save Calista.

MANFROY.

It is too late, too late; there is no need;
Henceforth she wants for nothing but a shroud;
Calista is no more. She lies there dead.

SISTER MONICA. O hateful wickedness! abhorred pair!

Accursed son of an accursed father!

To PALAMON.

You came to ravish one of God's own saints,
To wreak your lusts upon a helpless virgin;
I blame you not; you are your father's son;
Yes, look upon your honourable sire,
The admirable Duke, world-famous Manfroy,
Whose name in letters of untarnished gold
Is written on the monuments of Athens;
Manfroy the good! the upright and the just!
His honours and his titles are a mask
That hides a cancerous leprosy within.
This virtuous Duke just seventeen years ago
Did to me what you would have done to her,
Had God not interposed a pitiful hand.
And she Calista, who is lying there,
Stainless Calista, whom you both have slain,
Is mine, my daughter; there her father stands!
Leave us, most wretched men, and ask of God
Forgiveness for the evil you have done.
Leave us, for I alone shall keep this vigil.

SCENE III.

*A hall in MANFROY'S palace, as in Scene II. MANFROY and
LYSIMACHUS, GNOTHO and CIMBRIO discovered. It is morning
—sunlight and blue sky.*

MANFROY. Leave me alone with them. [*Exit LYSIMACHUS.*]
Gnotho, you were sentenced for breaking into the ducal gardens and
killing and stealing a swan.

GNOTHO. Yes, my liege.

MANFROY. And you, Cimbrio, contrived Gnotho's escape, and tried
to be his substitute at the gallows; but the fraud was detected, and
execution postponed.

CIMBRIO. Yes, my liege.

MANFROY. Why did you do this, Cimbrio?

CIMBRIO. I am a thief by trade, thieves are gallows' meat.

MANFROY. Why did you willingly put your neck in the noose for
Gnotho's sake?

CIMBRIO. Sir, forgive me for keeping silence, but there are some
things which are outside the sphere of your knowledge.

MANFROY. A good ruler should know all that his subjects feel.

CIMBRIO. You are a monarch, robed in authority; you hold the
sword of justice in one hand and the sceptre of state in the other.
You are Duke Manfroy, the just. Your world is the court. Our
world is that of the poor; you cannot understand it; still less my
world, which is that of outlaws, vagabonds and thieves. We speak a
different language.

MANFROY. But I have the power to release you and Gnotho.

CIMBRIO. We solicit nothing. It is for you to do your duty; to
sentence; and for us to pay the penalty.

MANFROY. But if I reprieve you?

CIMBRIO. Sir, I would take no favour at your hands, for we in our rags despise you in your robes and crown. As for me, I rejoice in every injury I may have done to you and yours.

MANFROY. You shall not be hanged in Gnotho's stead.

CIMBRIO. Shall Gnotho be freed?

MANFROY. Gnotho has been found guilty and sentenced by the law, and he must pay the penalty. Tell me why you took his place and you shall be pardoned.

CIMBRIO. Even if I would I could not, for you cannot understand such things, you are too far removed from us.

MANFROY. In the past I have had my reverses, Cimbrio, I too have felt the sharpness of poverty.

CIMBRIO. It is not what has befallen a man which is of account, but what he is. Many tyrants have risen from the ranks of the poor. Have they been less tyrannical for that? Nay, rather more so. Whatever you were in the past, you are now a mask, an effigy, an idol; and we of the gutter despise you. You are cut off from our fellowship; and not all your power will ever win a good word or a kind look from us. You are hateful to us, sir; and between us there is a gulf which nothing can bridge. I prefer to die sooner than take a favour at your hands.

MANFROY. It is the office you despise and hate, the symbol of authority, the crown?

CIMBRIO. No, sir, not the office; the man. We feel that you are not what you seem to be. We feel sure that you are a hypocrite; and that at the day of judgment our crimes will be no worse than yours. It is not the Duke of Athens we shrink from but Duke Manfroy.

MANFROY. And do all my people share your feelings?

CIMBRIO. You are acclaimed by your courtiers, smothered in flattery. Your name is written in letters of gold. They call you Manfroy the wise, the good, the just; but we of the gutter and the

gibbet know better ; we know that you are Manfroy the proud, Manfroy the pharisee, Manfroy the evil, Manfroy the damned.

A procession of friars, led by the FRIAR, passes along the street facing the loggia of MANFROY'S room. A Priest and a boy bearing a taper and ringing a bell, walk in front. They pass along out of sight, walking into the house. Enter the FRIAR. There is a moment's pause, and from the belfry of the church in the street a bell rings three times—and after a pause, three times again.

MANFROY [*looking at the FRIAR and kneeling*]. Have mercy on me, miserable sinner.

FRIAR. I come to claim fulfilment of your promise,
Your soul is mine to give to God Almighty.

MANFROY. May He receive it and be merciful ;
But to what sick or dying man, good friar,
Bring they the body of Christ?

FRIAR. It is for you.

MANFROY. For me? My life new-born has just begun ;
A malefactor has unsealed my eyes ;
Cimbrio, you are pardoned.

CIMBRIO. I have said
That I would take no gift from you, Duke Manfroy,
But you shall take a fatal gift from me.

CIMBRIO *stabs* MANFROY.

THE CROWD. Help, help, the Duke! the Duke! They murder him!

FRIAR. Carry him to a couch ; he is not dead.
They carry the DUKE away.

SCENE IV.

MANFROY'S palace. MANFROY *discovered lying on a bed. Monks are chanting in the next room.*

MANFROY. Tell them I pardon Cimbrio and Gnotho.
They will accept it from a dying man.
Now, Palamon, come closer, bend your ear,
My numbered minutes run like falling sand;
Go to the convent, ask for Sister Monica,
Tell her that reconciled at last and shriven,
I died remorseful of a life of sin.
Farewell, my precious son, my Palamon,
Farewell, Chichibio, my faithful fool,
Lysimachus, my friend, and all who served me,
Farewell, and write upon my tomb—"Here lies
A man who sinned, whom Satan thought to take,
But whom our Master pitied, and gave him Grace."
Where is the friar?

PALAMON. No sooner had he ended
The solemn rites and ministered to you
The holy oils and the Viaticum,
Than, suddenly, without a word, he went,
So noiselessly that no one saw him go.

MANFROY. He was no mortal friar. I know you now,
I see you now, an angel with great wings,
You have gone back to do your dateless duty,
A Standard-bearer, in the halls of God!
To sound the silver trumpets in the dawn,
To call men to the battlements of light.
Lord, I am here; Thy soldier; hark! the sound
Of waters and of war upon the sea!

O lift me from eclipse into the dawn !
Good sir, we need no blows for loitering,
We're faint, and if you beat us, we shall die,
The lightnings have destroyed our ship; she
founders,
With hey, with ho, and we are free to drown.
O save me from the business of the dark !
Save me, I perish, Jesu, Mary. Peace.

He dies.

LYSIMACHUS. The Duke is dead. Long live Duke Palamon !
Carry the body to the Parthenon.

CHICHIBIO. My master, O my master, pray for me,
To-day in paradise, for every day
Thy faithful fool in secret prayed for thee,
And with his broken heart is praying still.

*Enter SISTER MONICA. She kneels down beside PALAMON
before the couch.*

SISTER MONICA. O grant thy servant, Manfroy, who has left
His frail abode of transitory clay,
And gone before us with the sign of Faith,
Light and refreshment and a place of peace.

THE END.

JUNE—AND AFTER.
A COMEDY IN THREE ACTS.

To R. K.

PERSONS OF THE PLAY.

FREDERICK PALMER of the Royal College of Music, 44 years old, in Act I.

CAPTAIN WILFRID NEVERN, 36 years old.

JAMES SHAWCROSS, 35 years old in Act I.

FRANCIS SALT LAKE, 36 years old.

MRS. CASWELL, 25 years old in Act I.

JUNE PALMER (afterwards LADY NEVERN), 18 years old in Act I.

JULIA PALMER (Frederick Palmer's wife), 38 years old.

HESTER WATKINS (her sister), 30 years old in Act I.

MRS. BRIMSDALE BRISCOE (Frederick Palmer's sister), 45 years old.

VICTORIA NEVERN, 18 years old.

FLORA, Parlour Maid at "The Birches."

KATE, Parlour Maid at Bryanston Square.

ACT I takes place at "The Birches," Wimbledon, Mr. Palmer's house.

ACTS II and III at Lady Nevern's house in Bryanston Square.

Eighteen years elapse between ACTS I and II.

One night elapses between ACTS II and III.

ACT I takes place in 1904.

ACT II takes place in 1922.

ACT I.

Drawing room at "The Birches," Wimbledon, MR. FREDERICK PALMER'S house. A pleasant, comfortably furnished room. Two French windows open on to a garden. There are doors R. and L. The door R. goes into the front hall. Fireplace, R.; chairs and small tables round it. A bookcase between the windows. A large round table, L. It is the afternoon of a fine day in August, 1904. MRS. PALMER is discovered arranging chairs at the round table. She is 38 years old.

MRS. PALMER [*calling through the door, L.*] Frederick, Frederick dear,

MR. PALMER [*off*] Coming, my love. Coming!

Enter MR. PALMER, 44 years old, wears pince-nez; he is very absent-minded.

MRS. PALMER. There, I have arranged the chairs round the table. I think we had better sit at the table. Your sister Marion is so fidgety when she's not sitting at a table.

MR. PALMER. Very well, dear. Just as you like. You won't need me, I think. I am particularly busy to-day. Counterpoint exercises to correct, the score of a trilogy on "Boadicea," which one of the pupils has sent me to look through, and the orchestral score of my "Fair Rosamund."

MRS. PALMER. Oh, dear! But you can't leave me alone with Hester and Marion, especially with Marion, to-day of all days. You know how clever Hester is, and what Marion can be. I know I'm not clever, and so I didn't get a wink of sleep last night. Even the night before last, before the calamity, I was restless. I put the large

watch under my pillow, Uncle Harry's travelling clock-watch—such a large watch—so much so that when I woke up it was four o'clock in the morning. I felt something was going to happen then. I felt it ever since Wilfrid dropped Marion's wedding present; that handsome gilt glass. I said to him at the time that I wished he could have broken anyone else's present but Marion's, and anything else but a mirror.

MR. PALMER. But Wilfrid will be here to support you. [*He hums the Sword Motiv from "Siegfried."*]

MRS. PALMER. Wilfrid had better not be here at the first, and, besides which, he's far too upset to do himself justice. I feel I must have support. I cannot face your sister without you.

MR. PALMER. What time will they be here? I am really up to my eyes in work.

MRS. PALMER. Hester said she would come by the train arriving at 2.50 and would bicycle from the station, and Marion is, of course, driving over.

MR. PALMER. There's a bell. I must go and get tidy.

MRS. PALMER. You will be sure to come back, won't you?

MR. PALMER. Yes, yes.

He goes out humming "Oh, dear, what can the matter be?"

Enter FLORA, Parlour Maid, R.

FLORA [*announcing*] Mrs. Brimsdale Briscoe; Miss Watkins.

MRS. BRIMSDALE BRISCOE (*45 years old*) is dressed expensively. MISS WATKINS (*30 years old*) wears a tweed coat and skirt and has with her a parcel of books from the London Library, done up with a strap. FLORA goes out, R. MRS. PALMER goes to greet her sister and her sister-in-law; she embraces her sister-in-law first and then her sister.

MRS. PALMER. Marion, dear. Hester, too. This is indeed kind of you both.

MRS. BRIMSDALE BRISCOE. I can't say, my dear, that it is a convenient day for me. Thursday always was my busiest day, and I was forced to put off an important committee meeting on the Autumn Jumble Sale. By the way, Julia, I have not yet received those old clothes of Frederick's you promised me.

MRS. PALMER. It's all this worry that has put it out of my head, I'm sure. I remembered them the day before yesterday.

MISS WATKINS. Where is Frederick?

MRS. PALMER. He's coming in a moment.

MRS. BRIMSDALE BRISCOE. And where is Captain Nevern? I think that is a far more pertinent question, as I understood from your letter we have been summoned here to discuss a situation which concerns him more nearly than any of us, and for which he is no doubt responsible.

MISS WATKINS. I am entirely in the dark as to what the situation is, as Frederick considered that a telegram was sufficient to summon me from my work on my one off day in the week during term time, and a fortnight before the examinations.

MRS. PALMER. Sit down, dears, do. Round the table there. We shall all be more comfortable. Frederick will be here in a moment.

They sit down. Enter FREDERICK, L. He embraces

MRS. BRISCOE and shakes hands with MISS WATKINS.

MR. PALMER. Quite a family gathering, isn't it? A family symphony—in the minor—alas!

MRS. BRIMSDALE BRISCOE. Frederick, I hardly think—

MR. PALMER. Sorry, dear. [*He sits down.*] Julia has no doubt explained to you what—why—in fact—the reason for this . . . rather—in fact altogether—

MISS WATKINS. Julia has explained nothing. I learnt from a telegram, the text of which was corrupt but which I was able to reconstruct, that my presence was urgently needed.

MRS. BRIMSDALE BRISCOE. And I understood very little from

Julia's letter, and I must say, Julia, your handwriting gets more and more difficult to read, especially as you will cross and recross.

MR. PALMER. Well—the fact is—June—“She's kirtled her skirts of green satin and she's off with Lord Ronald Macdonald.” [*He hums the tune of “Lazie Lindsay.”*]

MRS. PALMER. It wasn't June's fault, dear.

MR. PALMER. No, no, of course not.

MISS WATKINS. Please keep to the point, Frederick, and let us have the facts.

MRS. PALMER. It was on the Monday—

MR. PALMER. I think it was Tuesday, love. No, no, you're quite right, it was Monday. [*He hums the Fate Bar from the Fifth Symphony.*]

MRS. BRIMSDALE BRISCOE. Please don't hum, Frederick.

MR. PALMER. I beg your pardon.

MRS. PALMER. Now you've muddled me. It was on the Tuesday, the day Wilfrid broke—no, I don't mean that. Well, you both of you know Mr. Shawcross?

MISS WATKINS. I've never heard of him.

MRS. BRIMSDALE BRISCOE. The only favourable thing I have heard of him is, that he is connected with the Herefordshire Shawcrosses.

MRS. PALMER. June met him on the links, and Frederick asked him to lunch.

MR. PALMER. I couldn't do otherwise, my love. He walked home with us. It was lunch time. He carried the clubs all the way home. [*Begins to hum “Oh, Mary, go and call the cattle home,” and stops abruptly.*]

MRS. PALMER. That was at the beginning of the summer holidays. Frederick took a fancy to him. He's musical and turns over, Frederick says, better than anyone he had ever met, and he and June played duets; but we never thought anything of that. Two days

ago, June received a letter by the second post from Elsie Caswell—who used to be Elsie Stone—she's married—

MRS. BRIMSDALE BRISCOE. That governess who I always said was far too young?

MRS. PALMER. Only a *finishing* governess, dear, and she knew French and German, and helped me with the linen and Frederick's music paper. As I was saying, June received a letter from Elsie asking her to go to London as she was in trouble.

MISS WATKINS. Who was in trouble?

MRS. PALMER. Elsie. Frederick said of course she must go.

MR. PALMER. It was Wilfrid, my dear. I had nothing whatever to do with the arrangements.

MRS. PALMER. So as Frederick seemed to think she had better go, and so did Wilfrid, and before I had time to think it all over and see what else could be done, she packed her things and went.

MISS WATKINS. When did she go?

MRS. PALMER. She went yesterday by the five o'clock train. She hadn't been out of the house half an hour before who should walk into the house but Elsie herself. You could have knocked me down with a feather. I said to her, "And where is June?" And then it all came out that she had never written to June at all. Elsie knew nothing of her visit; and it appears she had telegraphed to June saying she was coming here—and Frederick said—

MR. PALMER. I think I made no comment, my dear.

MRS. PALMER. Well, in any case I said, "If she's not gone to Elsie's, where has she gone to?" But I was too overcome to say much. I was cold all over. I rang the bell twice and asked Flora to find out whether Tom, who had driven June to the station in the trap, had seen her safely into the train. And Tom said that Mr. Shawcross had happened to be at the station and had happened to be going to London by the same train, and that he had seen them both get into the same carriage. And then Wilfrid came back from

London. He went to his room and on his new pincushion he found a letter from June saying she was very sorry—and I know the poor child was speaking the truth—but that she realised that she did not love him, as she felt she *ought* to love a husband, but that she would always look upon him as a *friend*, and that she loved another and so she thought it more honest to say so at once.

MRS. BRIMSDALE BRISCOE. Who is the other?

MRS. PALMER. I was coming to that. She didn't say till the end of the letter that she felt bound to Mr. Shawcross and that she was going to London to be married.

MRS. BRIMSDALE BRISCOE. And what, pray, was Wilfrid's attitude?

MRS. PALMER. Wilfrid was quite overcome, but just as thoughtful as always. He said he supposed he would have to send back the wedding presents and said he was sorry he had broken the—I mean the glass bowl that you—I mean that Elsie had sent June.

MRS. BRIMSDALE BRISCOE. I always said she would make a fool of him.

MISS WATKINS. You always encouraged June to be frivolous, but I am inclined to think the whole matter is a blessing in disguise. Captain Nevern is singularly incompetent and unformed—

MRS. BRIMSDALE BRISCOE. My dear Hester! What are you saying? A blessing! You forget that we know next to nothing about Mr. Shawcross, and what we do know is not altogether satisfactory, whereas Captain Nevern is at least a Nevern and a captain, with a fixed income, and, what's more, the heir to Sir Bertram Nevern, unless Sir Bertram marries again, which is out of the question as he's over 70; and Wilfrid, although I admit he is not clever—

MISS WATKINS. He certainly isn't clever.

MRS. PALMER. Oh, Hester, don't be so satirical; we can't all be clever. We can't all win the Tripes, and I do think it's unkind of you to sneer at Wilfrid now that he has got all this to bear and when we think of all he's done—

MISS WATKINS. What has Wilfrid ever done?

MRS. PALMER. He did very well in South Africa. General Hawksley told me he was most painstaking. He was an R.T.O.

MRS. BRIMSDALE BRISCOE. And what is that?

MRS. PALMER. Well, it's almost as good as the D.S.O. He saw all the people and soldiers on and off the boats, and if it hadn't been for him and all the good work he did—

MRS. BRIMSDALE BRISCOE. Well?

MRS. PALMER. Well, all I know is the War Office were very pleased with him.

MISS WATKINS. Let us leave the topic of Wilfrid for the moment. The question is, why are we here now, and what, dear Julia, do you wish us to do?

MRS. PALMER. Frederick thought you both would be such a help. But I haven't told you all. Directly Elsie grasped the situation she said there was not a moment to lose. She said she knew Mr. Shawcross of old, and that he was not to be trusted. Before I had time to turn she was on to her bicycle and off to the station in no time, and said she would bring June back again. Well, late last night we got a telegram from her saying—"June found; all well; staying with me. Hope return to-morrow morning." This morning we got a letter telling us how she had found June. She had been to the dressmaker's first, but she wasn't there. Then she had gone to two or three hotels, and at last she thought Bertram, the hair-waver, might have seen her, so she went there, and, as luck would have it, there she found June having her hair waved. June had taken a room in an hotel, but Elsie took her off to her flat. This morning we received another telegram, saying—"Hope arrive this afternoon." So we sent the trap to the station and told Tom to wait in case, but I fear June is perhaps being obstinate. She is such a high-spirited girl and takes after you, Hester dear. And now I say, "What are we to do?"

MISS WATKINS. I cannot see that there is anything to be done. Whether June marries Mr. Shawcross or Captain Nevern, or anyone else, she is sure to regret it. She is surely old enough to know her own mind.

MRS. BRIMSDALE BRISCOE. I'm shocked to hear you talk like that, Hester. You forget the disgrace it brings upon us all. To run away with a strange man to London when you are engaged to be married into one of the most respectable county families. Besides which we know nothing of Mr. Shawcross's intentions. Are they honourable? That is the question.

MR. PALMER. I confess I have nothing to say against Shawcross. I always found him extremely amiable. [*Begins to hum the end of "The Duke of Plaza Toro."* MRS. BRIMSDALE BRISCOE *frowns at him. He stops.*]

MRS. BRIMSDALE BRISCOE. What is Mr. Shawcross?

MRS. PALMER. Well, he's something in the City. Something to do with indiarubber.

MISS WATKINS. Is he married already?

MR. PALMER. Oh, dear no—at least, I think not. I hope not.

MR. BRIMSDALE BRISCOE. You only think not.

MRS. PALMER. We never heard of a Mrs. Shawcross. She never called.

MISS WATKINS. None of you have yet touched upon Captain Nevern's attitude. Is it likely that after what has occurred he will still be anxious to marry a girl who finds that her nature is incompatible with his?

MRS. PALMER. Wilfrid is devoted to June. He is heart-broken.

MRS. BRIMSDALE BRISCOE. Please, my dear Hester, do not talk such nonsense about incompatibility and other such things. Let us talk plain English now that we *are* here. I am perfectly certain that nobody will regret this escapade more than June herself. As Mrs. Caswell will no doubt bring her back, I cannot see that there is any-

thing more to be said and done except to regard the incident as closed, and never to refer to it again.

MRS. PALMER. But we don't know yet whether June will come back.

MISS WATKINS. And we don't know yet whether she is still a spinster. Marriages at the Registrar's Office are performed with great despatch.

MRS. PALMER. Oh, please don't talk of the Registry Office. I couldn't bear to think that June would do such a thing.

Enter FLORA, R.

FLORA. Miss June and Mrs. Caswell have arrived, ma'am, and Mrs. Caswell says that she will be down directly, and that Miss June has gone to rest as she is tired after the journey.

MRS. PALMER. Oh yes, quite right. What a relief. What a blessed relief.

MRS. BRIMSDALE BRISCOE. In that case would you kindly ask for my carriage. There is nothing more that I can do, and as to the future, you know I make it a rule never to give advice.

FLORA. The carriage is waiting at the door, ma'am.

MRS. BRIMSDALE BRISCOE *gets up*.

MRS. BRIMSDALE BRISCOE. Hester, we had better go at once.

MRS. PALMER. But won't you both stay for tea?

MISS WATKINS. No, thank you, Julia. I shall just be able to catch the 3.30. As it is I shall have to sit up till past midnight to get through my work.

MRS. BRIMSDALE BRISCOE. And you are not the only person, Hester, who has duties. Mine, though less intellectual than yours, are equally pressing. I will drop you at the station, it is on my way.

MISS WATKINS. Thank you, I have my bicycle. [*She gets up.*]

MRS. PALMER. Well, in any case we shall see you both at the wedding next Wednesday.

MRS. BRIMSDALE BRISCOE. Please let me know in plenty of time, if it is put off.

MRS. PALMER. Oh ! but my dear, it won't be put off.

MRS. BRIMSDALE BRISCOE. Good-bye, Frederick. Good-bye, Julia.

MISS WATKINS. I think we have done all that there was to be done. Good-bye.

MRS. BRIMSDALE BRISCOE and MISS WATKINS go out, R.
Enter MRS. CASWELL. *She is 25 years old. Very neat, elegant and pretty.*

MRS. CASWELL. I stole down the back way and into the study and waited till they were gone. [MRS. PALMER embraces her tearfully.]

MRS. PALMER. My dearest Elsie, how can we thank you. Now sit down and tell us everything. June—

MRS. CASWELL. I think we had better let June rest for the present [*Sits down.*] She travelled up with Mr. Shawcross, who had engaged a room for her at the Curzon Hotel. She then drove straight to Bertram, the hair-waver, and after trying several places it was there I found her. I persuaded her to come to my flat. She told me the whole story. She had arranged with Mr. Shawcross to marry him this morning by special license. They were to go to Boulogne for the honeymoon. I didn't scold her. I let her talk. She was a little bit ashamed of herself. She felt badly about Wilfrid. Well, at first I took it for granted that her decision was irrevocable. We talked of the future. Mr. Shawcross, to do him justice, hadn't deceived her. He has been optimistic, but nothing worse. She knows he isn't well off.

MRS. PALMER. And Wilfrid has got such a nice safe income, all tied up in the three per cents.

MRS. CASWELL. Exactly. I pointed that out. When she talked of love in a cottage, I made her see what love in a cottage would mean to Mr. Shawcross. How he would have to give up his clubs and never dine at restaurants, and never go to Paris or even Brighton, and I tried and I think I succeeded in making her understand what

Mr. Shawcross had been used to up to now. I asked her if she didn't think she was being a little bit selfish. Wasn't she perhaps sacrificing Wilfrid's happiness without being sure of making Mr. Shawcross happy? She saw my point, but she felt she had gone too far to go back. I told her I would settle everything for her, and I got her to promise to come back here first and to do nothing till she had seen you. Then I persuaded June to telegraph to Mr. Shawcross and tell him she must have time to think things over and that she must see you first. I persuaded her not to write. In the evening I took her to Earl's Court to distract her. I got June to send him a telegram saying we were coming back here. June begged to stay till the afternoon, and I humoured her, as I thought a little shopping might do her good. I think she still had a faint hope she would somehow see him. After lunch she was willing to come back.

MR. PALMER. Then it's all very satisfactory and we needn't refer to the matter again, and I can go back to my work.

MRS. PALMER. Wait a moment, Frederick.

MRS. CASWELL. Well, I don't know if it's quite as simple as all that. June is undoubtedly very much attracted by Mr. Shawcross and he is very much attracted by her. He won't give in without a struggle, and unfortunately Captain Nevern is not the kind of man to carry a girl off her feet.

MR. PALMER [*begins to hum "The Girl I left behind me"*] No, he's not the kind of man. [MRS. CASWELL *looks at him. He pulls himself together.*] But if she cannot exactly see her way to marrying Wilfrid, and if she still wishes to marry Mr. Shawcross, is there any reason why she should not? I have always found him such an amiable man. So considerate. Such a sense of rhythm.

MRS. PALMER. You forget Wilfrid's expectations, my love. Marion said that Sir Bertram was unlikely ever to marry again.

MRS. CASWELL. Mr. Shawcross is a most attractive person, I agree. But his income is precarious. He has extravagant tastes. He is

used to luxury. He has no expectations and he is notoriously fickle. He is never out of debt and never out of love.

MRS. PALMER. Oh, dear, how uncomfortable. How unlike dear Wilfrid, who adds up his bills once a week.

MR. PALMER. But perhaps if he married and settled down—

MRS. CASWELL. If he married he would go on living just as he does now, from hand to mouth.

MRS. PALMER. My dear, how clever of you to know so much about Mr. Shawcross.

MRS. CASWELL. Before I came here to you I was, you remember, with the Tilbury-Lacys. Mr. Tilbury-Lacy is a cousin of Mr. Shawcross, and it was there that I met him.

MRS. PALMER. Well, I suppose it's all for the best.

MR. PALMER. What's for the best, my love?

MRS. PALMER. That June should marry Wilfrid after all. If she does marry Mr. Shawcross, let it at any rate be a real marriage and not at the Post Office.

Enter CAPTAIN NEVERN. He is 33 years old, rather vacant-looking, tidy, dressed in tweeds.

Here's Wilfrid. June's come back. Leezy has brought her. Everything will be all right, dear.

CAPTAIN NEVERN. How do you do, Mrs. Caswell. I am very grateful to you for taking so much trouble. Some more wedding presents have just arrived and I didn't quite know what to do with them. I hope June isn't very tired after all that travelling. Where is she? Can I see her?

MRS. PALMER. June is resting, dear. She will be down to tea.

CAPTAIN NEVERN. Oh, Mrs. Caswell, you were the very person I wanted to see. It's the fourth light in the *Strand Magazine* acrostic. I've guessed all the others. Its T and I. Look carefully before you leap. No, that's the other one. It's something about an eccentric,

an eccentric something. I don't quite remember, but it's been puzzling me all day. I'll bring it down presently. You're so clever at acrostics.

MRS. PALMER. Well, I *must* go back to my work.

He goes out, L.

MRS. PALMER. Frederick is very busy to-day.

CAPTAIN NEVERN. Can I go up and see June?

MRS. CASWELL. I think, Captain Nevern, I would leave her to rest just at present.

MRS. PALMER. She'll be down to tea.

CAPTAIN NEVERN. Then I'll have time for a short round of golf. T and E. Could it be tithe? T and E—title, time, trifle, turpentine. So long.

He goes out, R.

MRS. CASWELL. Perhaps I had better go up and see June.

MRS. PALMER. Yes, Elsie dearest, and bring her down to tea. She'll be all the better for a nice rest.

CAPTAIN NEVERN *puts his head through the door, R.*

CAPTAIN NEVERN. Oh, it isn't T E, it's T I. [CAPTAIN NEVERN *shuts the door.*]

MRS. PALMER. It will be all right, Leezy, won't it? You won't let her disappoint us all now that everything's ready and the presents labelled and arranged and the cake ordered.

MRS. CASWELL. I think it will be all right. I'll go up to her now.

MRS. PALMER. On your way, dear, do please say a word to Frederick and tell him to be civil to Wilfrid. He never listens to what Wilfrid says.

MRS. CASWELL. I will.

SHE goes out, L. Enter FLORA, R.

FLORA. Mr. Shawcross would like to speak to you, ma'am.

MRS. PALMER. Oh, is he there?

FLORA. Yes, ma'am. In the hall.

MRS. PALMER. Oh dear, I'm sure I don't know what to say. Did you say I was in?

FLORA. Yes, ma'am.

MRS. PALMER. You can show him in. [*Exit FLORA, R.*]
I must fetch Frederick at once. [*She goes to the door, L., and calls*]
Frederick, Frederick.

Enter FLORA, R.

FLORA. Mr. Shawcross.

Enter MR. SHAWCROSS.

MR. SHAWCROSS. How do you do, Mrs. Palmer?

MRS. PALMER. Oh, how do you do, Mr. Shawcross? Do sit down. I hope Frederick will be here in a moment. [*MR. SHAWCROSS sits down, R.*] He's dreadfully busy writing his "Rosamund" and correcting "Boadicea," and what with the counterpoint and one thing and another, we don't know where to turn. And Wilfrid's playing golf.

MR. SHAWCROSS. Oh, yes.

Pause.

MRS. PALMER. I can't think what Frederick's doing.

Pause.

MR. SHAWCROSS. It's very hot, isn't it?

MRS. PALMER. Yes, and we want rain so badly for the garden. There won't be a flower left soon if the drought goes on.

Enter MR. PALMER. MR. SHAWCROSS gets up.

MR. PALMER. Oh, how do you do, Shawcross?

MR. SHAWCROSS. How do you do, Mr. Palmer? I'm so sorry to disturb—

MR. PALMER. Not at all, not at all. [*He sits down and falls into an abstraction.*]

MRS. PALMER. I'll be back in a moment, Mr. Shawcross. I have a few little odds and ends to attend to.

She goes out, L.

MR. SHAWCROSS. Well, Mr. Palmer, I've come to say how very sorry I am, how distressed I am, that I . . . that I should have caused . . . that I should have behaved in so . . . the fact is, Mr. Palmer, we hadn't the nerve, we thought we could explain it better . . . we thought it would perhaps save trouble if we got married first and discussed it afterwards. I know it's quite indefensible, but, you see, some situations are so awkward.

MR. PALMER. [*Not listening*] So awkward.

MR. SHAWCROSS. I was a little bit alarmed at the line her aunts might take.

MR. PALMER. Might take. [*Hums to himself a bar.*] It's E sharp.
[*To MR. SHAWCROSS*] Yes, of course.

MR. SHAWCROSS. And I thought she might find it so difficult to explain to Mrs. Briscoe.

MR. PALMER. Quite, quite, to Mrs. Briscoe.

MR. SHAWCROSS. But the fact of the matter is that June thought she had made a mistake. Of course, Nevern comes from an excellent family, he's well off and did well in South Africa and all that, but she felt . . . she wasn't sure, whether as a life companion, he mightn't be a little bit monotonous. It was all my fault. I persuaded her to take the bull by the horns. You see, I didn't pause to reflect. I'm afraid I'm very impulsive. But then I'm very much in love with June, and now I've come to ask your forgiveness and to ask you whether there is any insuperable obstacle in the way of our marriage?

MR. PALMER. [*Who has not been listening*] Whether there is any insuperable obstacle in the way of the marriage? That seems to me to be the radical flaw in the libretto. I beg your pardon, I mean in the argument. There is no insuperable obstacle. Certainly not.

MR. SHAWCROSS. You see, Mr. Palmer, I don't pretend to be rich, but I think I shall always be able to make enough for us to live on. Last week I made two hundred pounds.

MR. PALMER. [*Absently*] Two hundred pounds. [*Hums a phrase from "The Rheingold."*]

MR. SHAWCROSS. Yes, at Sandown.

MR. PALMER. [*Absently*] Yes, at Sundown. [*Hums "O du mein holder Abendstern—"*]

MR. SHAWCROSS. I must say I'm generally fairly lucky in the City. I've got one or two influential friends who generally put me on to a good thing when they know something. There's Mr. Goldberg.

MR. PALMER. [*Waking up with a start*] The violinist?

MR. SHAWCROSS. Yes, he's the president of some musical society.

MR. PALMER. Quite so—at Manchester. A thoroughly sound musician. A trifle on the Wagnerian side. I heard him play in the Brahms Concerto at Manchester last year.

MR. SHAWCROSS. I think I could make June happy and comfortable. Of course, I'm not a City magnate like Goldberg. But Rome wasn't built in a day, was it?

MR. PALMER. Certainly not. [*Hums the "Valhalla" Motiv.*]

MR. SHAWCROSS. But I think I've got a certain position. I know I'm not a county swell or anything of that kind, but I have got relations, and, well, they're not immortal, and some of them might do something for me when they die, or perhaps even before. I've got a cousin who lives in Herefordshire—Timothy Shawcross, of Bellaston—who is very well off, and he's quarrelled with all his relations except with me. I've never given him the chance. I mean I've never annoyed him. All the others did. And he's crippled with gout, and often has influenza, and asthma, and Bright's disease, and I don't think he's likely to live very long. And then I've got another cousin who's a dean. I don't expect anything from him, but it's always nice to have a dean in the family. And there's just a chance that Goldberg may take me into his business some day, and, of course, if that happened, I should be as safe as a church.

Altogether, my prospects are not so gloomy; and as I love June, and as I believe she loves me, why couldn't we be married and have done with it?

MR. PALMER. Yes, couldn't we be married and have done with it? [*Hums a bar from Mendelssohn's "Wedding March."*]

MR. SHAWCROSS. You see, I was nervous and I acted on the spur of the moment, and I funk'd the family explanations, not with Mrs. Palmer and you, of course, but from what June told me of your sister-in-law, I was afraid I wouldn't stand a good chance. Relations are so difficult to deal with sometimes, aren't they?

MR. PALMER. [*Echoing*]. Aren't they? [*Humming from "Pinafore"*] "His sisters and his cousins whom he reckons up by dozens, his sisters and his cousins and his aunts."

MR. SHAWCROSS. Of course, I know my conduct was inexcusable. I don't pretend to defend it in any way, but I was just carried away.

MR. PALMER *stares absent-mindedly in front of him*.

MR. PALMER. The flute passage must come out, it won't be heard. I beg your pardon. Yes, as you were saying. I agree. I quite agree. Exactly, exactly.

MR. SHAWCROSS. Then I take it, Mr. Palmer, you have no objection to our marriage.

MR. PALMER. Oh dear no. I should always let June do exactly what she wishes. She's such a good, sensible girl and so musical. I don't know what I shall do without her. She's such a good critic. A critic on the hearth. All that will be wasted on Wilfrid. He has no ear, no ear at all. You must talk it over with my wife, and we will see what can be done. In the meantime, I am sure you will excuse me, Shawcross, and not think me very ill-bred, but the fact is I have got an orchestral score to correct by Saturday, and a Wagnerian trilogy to look through. We will—we will meet—well, I suppose we will meet.

MR. SHAWCROSS. I'm going back by the train to London this evening.

MR. PALMER. You must arrange everything with June and Julia. You see, it's rather awkward Wilfrid is staying here. I will send Julia to you. [*Humming*] "How happy I could be with either,"

MR. PALMER *goes out*, L. *Enter* MRS. CASWELL, L., *immediately after*.

MRS. CASWELL. Did you expect to see me here, James?

MR. SHAWCROSS. Well, I can't say I was surprised. I knew June had gone to your flat.

MRS. CASWELL. Let's sit down and have a little talk. [*They sit down*, R.] I brought June back this afternoon. She came to me directly she got to London. She felt she couldn't take such a step without talking it over first. She told me all about it, poor child. She's in a very difficult position, isn't she? You see, Wilfrid Nevern adores her, and everything was settled, and they were all so happy about it, and, as you know, the Palmers are not well off. June will have practically nothing, and Wilfrid Nevern *is* well off; and besides, he's sure to inherit everything from his uncle, who's very old, and the poor child had no one to discuss things with. You know what they are. Mrs. Palmer's hopeless, and Mr. Palmer is so wrapt up in his work, and after all she was quite happy till quite lately, and now, of course, it's a great upset for everybody. But, of course, if you think you can make the child happy and can support her, and make a home for her, I should be the last person to wish to interfere.

MR. SHAWCROSS. I've been talking to her father. He is quite in favour of it.

MRS. CASWELL. Yes, of course, but then you know how unpractical he is. He always thinks a quail's too much for dinner and a leg of mutton is too little. You really are quite sure, aren't you, that you'll be able to provide for the poor child?

MR. SHAWCROSS. Well, I did very well last week.

MRS. CASWELL. At Sandown, I suppose?

MR. SHAWCROSS. Well, yes.

MRS. CASWELL. And you are quite sure, aren't you, that you won't change your mind? You see, you'll have to change so many things, won't you? You'll have to give up that comfortable flat in the Albany; and flats and houses are so expensive now, and servants so difficult to get, and poor June has no experience in housekeeping. She's inherited all her father's charming vagueness and generosity. And then, you know, she is rather spoilt, and used to having everything done for her. She has no idea what it is to save, and she knows nothing about housekeeping. Mrs. Palmer is an excellent housekeeper. Of course, you would do all that for her. You would keep the household accounts, and engage the servants, and order dinner, and all that. Dear June has no head for figures, but all that would be child's play to you, wouldn't it? And of course you would want her to be well dressed, and to be able to go out, and go to the play when she wanted to. Of course, I know how well you are doing in the City, and I'm sure you have got rid of all those tiresome creditors you used to have; and when they saw you settling down, they wouldn't worry you so much. They used to be such a dreadful worry, usen't they?

MR. SHAWCROSS. Yes, they used. I've got enough to keep the Jews from the door.

MRS. CASWELL. And then you'll have to be a little careful with June. She's such a sensitive child; and inclined, like all high-spirited girls, to be jealous. You would, of course, give up all your old friends, wouldn't you? I mean June wouldn't understand.

MR. SHAWCROSS. Of course, all that's over.

MRS. CASWELL. Yes, of course. But you've got so many old friends, haven't you, who are almost part of your life? I mean Nellie Playfair, for instance.

MR. SHAWCROSS. She's gone to America.

MRS. CASWELL. Mrs. Aylmer?

MR. SHAWCROSS. She's a cousin.

MRS. CASWELL. Yes, but such a distant cousin, and such an intimate one.

MR. SHAWCROSS. I haven't seen her for months.

MRS. CASWELL. And then Dora Walkely.

MR. SHAWCROSS. Oh, she's only a racing friend, and I've quite given up racing.

MRS. CASWELL. But you did well at Sandown last week.

MR. SHAWCROSS. Yes, that was my last week.

MRS. CASWELL. And then your clubs. You couldn't belong to so many clubs, could you?

MR. SHAWCROSS. I'm going to cut them all down except those I have to belong to. You see, I have to belong to a good club because of the City, and then the shops like it. It's an economy in the long run.

MRS. CASWELL. And then, you know, you would have to give up coming to see me quite so often. June wouldn't like it, and I don't think it would be fair on her. You see, I'm very fond of June, and I wouldn't hurt her feelings for the world. You must realise that once you were married everything would be quite different.

MR. SHAWCROSS. I don't see why it should make any difference to our friendship. I am sure June would understand and would like us to be friends.

MRS. CASWELL. Everything would be quite different. I have a horror of complicated situations. I do want you to understand that. I'm not like a woman about that sort of thing. I'm like a man, and I like everything to be straight, open and above-board. I should think it very wrong to receive even a crumb of intimacy which would now be June's by right, and June's only.

MR. SHAWCROSS. But, after all, your being married hasn't changed things. Why should my marriage make such a difference?

MRS. CASWELL. My dear James, don't you see that was quite a different matter altogether. Robert is a man and June is a woman. Robert doesn't mind. June would mind and *I* would mind.

MR. SHAWCROSS. Of course, if you take it like that.

MRS. CASWELL. I do take it like that. June is a child and she has no idea that we ever have been friends. Well, I hope you quite understand. I think you will be able to get a reasonably cheap service flat. There's one to let in St. George's Court. It's rather dark and the food isn't very good, but I think you would be able to afford it. You couldn't possibly afford a house. At any rate, I'll help you to find something.

MR. SHAWCROSS. You think it's impossible?

MRS. CASWELL. Not at all impossible, only I do want you to realise exactly what it means before it is too late. You see, I know you both so well and I only want you both to be happy. I know June far better than you do and she doesn't really know you at all. She'll find when she's married you that she's married someone else. I have lived for a year in the same house with her, and I'm quite certain that she won't change, nor will you.

MR. SHAWCROSS. I can't very well go back on what I've said now, after all I've told her father.

MRS. CASWELL. I doubt if he listened. He's very absent-minded.

MR. SHAWCROSS. And then there's June.

MRS. CASWELL. I'll make it all right with June.

MR. SHAWCROSS. And do you want me to stand by and see her marry that ass Nevern?

MRS. CASWELL. My dear, that's just the kind of man she'll be happy with. He's not very brilliant, but he's got a wonderful head for accounts and he'll make her very comfortable. Besides, he's got enough for them both to live on, and you haven't. That's the bald, brutal truth, isn't it?

MR. SHAWCROSS. Well, what do you want me to do?

MRS. CASWELL. To go away by the next train.

MR. SHAWCROSS. Without seeing her?

MRS. CASWELL. Yes, without seeing her.

MR. SHAWCROSS. Won't she think it very heartless, and won't Mr. Palmer think it very odd?

MRS. CASWELL. I'll manage that all right for you.

MR. SHAWCROSS. You're an angel, Elsie. I always said you were an angel.

MRS. CASWELL. Now, you'll just have time to catch the four o'clock train, if you're quick. Good-bye, James, and I'll write to you by to-night's post.

Enter JUNE, R.

JUNE. Will you leave us alone a minute, Elsie? [MRS. CASWELL goes towards the door.] And don't let father or mother come in till I call.

MRS. CASWELL. Very well.

She goes out, R.

JUNE [*smiling*]. I've come to my senses, James. We have been a pair of geese, haven't we?

MR. SHAWCROSS. Your father didn't seem to think so.

JUNE. No, he wouldn't.

MR. SHAWCROSS. How did you know I was here?

JUNE. I saw you through the window. You've been talking to Elsie. Elsie thinks I'm an idiot and a baby, but I'm not. I always knew it was absurd, but I couldn't resist the intoxicating feeling of escaping. I was sure it wouldn't come off really. You're not the kind of man one marries, James, but you're the kind one longs to marry, which is better. Wilfrid's the kind one marries, and I'm going to marry him.

MR. SHAWCROSS. You've quite made up your mind then?

JUNE. Quite.

MR. SHAWCROSS. I hope you'll be very happy. I'm sure he'll look after you very well.

JUNE. No, I shall look after him. I shall help him with the acrostic. Seriously, he needs looking after more than you do.

MR. SHAWCROSS. Who will look after me?

JUNE. At present quite a lot of people. Much later on I think you will marry some very nice, cosy, sensible, practical woman.

MR. SHAWCROSS. Oh dear.

JUNE. You know I'm right, don't you?

MR. SHAWCROSS. Well, I think that perhaps . . .

JUNE. It's best for all concerned. You like love in a cottage, James, but you wouldn't like marriage in a cottage, and that's what it would have meant. You see, I know exactly what you're used to, and what you would have to give up. And you couldn't give up everything.

MR. SHAWCROSS. I assure you I was quite prepared—

JUNE. I know you thought you were. But, for one thing, Elsie would never have allowed it. She thinks I knew nothing about all that episode in your lives, but I always knew.

MR. SHAWCROSS. But, my dear child, since Elsie married I have hardly set eyes on her.

JUNE. Not more than once a week. Elsie knows you belong to her, and doesn't mean to give you up.

MR. SHAWCROSS. You're wrong, I swear you're wrong.

JUNE. I knew the moment Elsie knew about it that it was all over. I knew before that that somehow or other she would find out about it. I knew it would never come off. You see, James, it wasn't your fault. You can't help making up to people and saying more than you mean, and even running away with them. And you have to be helped not to marry them. Elsie did the helping beautifully. But, as a matter of fact, it wasn't necessary. I thought of all the things I know she has told you. And I know about the other things—

your friends—which would make it difficult, and she doesn't dream that I know all that. Admit, dearest James, that you are immensely relieved.

MR. SHAWCROSS. You're being absurd.

JUNE. Imagine if I were to say I'd go back with you now.

MR. SHAWCROSS. I have only just asked your father whether I mightn't marry you.

JUNE. One can say anything to papa. He doesn't listen. He has got too many tunes in his head. Well, it's been very nice and exciting while it lasted, and now, good-bye. We won't be melodramatic, we'll just say good-bye. [*She goes to the door and calls*] Come in, Elsie, James is going. [*To MR. SHAWCROSS*] I'll just see you as far as the door.

They go out, R. Enter MRS. CASWELL and MRS. PALMER, L.

MRS. PALMER. Oh, dear, she's not here. Do you think she's run away again? That would be dreadful. I don't think we could bear. a second shock.

MRS. CASWELL. No, it's all right. She'll be back in a moment.

MRS. PALMER. And what did Mr Shawcross have to say for himself? I'm glad I didn't see him. I should have been obliged to speak my mind, and that's always so disagreeable, isn't it? Especially on such a hot day.

MRS. CASWELL. He's gone. He was very, very sorry for all the trouble he had given, and he quite realises now that it was all a mistake.

MRS. PALMER. Well, I must say it is a relief. But it was very inconsiderate of him to run away on Marion's committee day, and Hester will never forgive me for having brought her all the way down here for nothing during her busiest week. [*Enter JUNE, R.*] Ah, there is June. I'll run and fetch Frederick. June, darling, I'm fetching your father.

MRS. PALMER goes out, L.

MRS. CASWELL. Has he gone?

JUNE. Yes, it's all right. I told him that I mean to marry Wilfrid, that is to say if Wilfrid still wants to.

MRS. CASWELL. Wilfrid has behaved nobly, and they all quite understand—both your father and your mother—and they won't say anything about it.

JUNE. Well, I suppose I must marry Wilfrid after all.

MRS. CASWELL. I don't see how you could very well do anything else *now*.

Enter WILFRID, R.

CAPTAIN NEVERN. June! [*He kisses her.*] I've got such a wonderful piece of news for you. I suppose I oughtn't really to call it good news, but I've just had a telegram to say that my Uncle Bertram is dead.

MRS. CASWELL. Well, that is good news. You are his heir.

CAPTAIN NEVERN. I believe I am. In fact, I'm sure I am. Of course, it's very sad and all that, but it's wonderful all the same.

Enter MR. and MRS. PALMER, L.

MRS. PALMER. Oh, June darling, come and give us both a hug.

MR. PALMER. My dear June, I am delighted to see you back. I want your advice badly about a flute passage in the last act.

JUNE. We have got news for you.

MRS. PALMER. Oh dear, I'm so frightened of news. Nothing bad, I hope.

JUNE. Wilfrid's uncle, Sir Bertram Nevern, is dead.

MR. PALMER. Oh, dead, is he? Sir Bertram Nevern. Yes. [*He whistles a bar from Chopin's "Funeral March."*] Well, I think we might all have tea. Where is the tea?

MRS. PALMER. Tea is ready in the garden.

CAPTAIN NEVERN. And I've guessed the acrostic. That light. T I, you know. It is Tolstoi.

JUNE. Go on, I'll come in one minute.

They go out through the window into the garden. JUNE
sits down in a chair and cries silently.

CURTAIN.

ACT II.

Drawing room in Lady Nevern's house in Bryanston Square. Windows would be where the footlights are. The drawing room leads into a back drawing room. Door, L.C., leading into back drawing room, and L., leading on to staircase. Fireplace, R., and sofa opposite it. Chairs. Writing table, L., with sofa in front of it. The afternoon of a winter's day, 1922. LADY NEVERN is sitting on the sofa opposite a tea table. VICTORIA NEVERN is sitting on the other side of the table.

VICTORIA. Mother.

LADY NEVERN. Yes, darling.

VICTORIA. I've mixed up the cards that came with the two last presents, and I don't know which belonged to the silver fish-slice and which to the bound copy of Tennyson's poems. One is from a Mrs Reynolds and the other from a Mrs. Streatfield. I don't know either of them.

LADY NEVERN. Say, thank you so much for your lovely present, to each of them.

VICTORIA. Yes, but I don't know whether the fish-slice was for me or for James.

LADY NEVERN. I should think the poems must be for you.

VICTORIA. No friend of mine would dream of sending me a Tennyson.

LADY NEVERN. Then I should wait till James comes. He'll be here this evening, won't he?

VICTORIA. Yes, of course.

LADY NEVERN. Would you like some tea, darling?

VICTORIA. No, thank you, mother. You know I don't approve of tea drinking.

LADY NEVERN. I know, but I thought that as you had had rather a tiring day to-day, it might do you good.

VICTORIA. That's just the time not to drink tea, when one's tired. Tea is a toxic stimulant. I had a plasmon biscuit at four, and I'll have a cocktail before dinner.

LADY NEVERN. I hope you'll let James have tea when he's married.

VICTORIA. Of course, mother dear. You know, I think it foolish ever to try and convert people. One must let them find out things for themselves. Set them an example by all means, but never preach. It's such a mistake, besides which James never drinks tea. He always has a whisky and soda, which is far more harmless than tea. There, I've finished. What nonsense all this present-giving is. I'm just going to walk twice round the square and then I shall come in.

LADY NEVERN. Are you going out again?

VICTORIA. I haven't had any exercise to-day. I don't call shopping and calling exercise.

LADY NEVERN. Well, don't stay out too long, it's so damp.

VICTORIA. I like the damp. Good-bye for the present. By the way, I made that appointment with Miss Jones, the manicurist, for you at 5.30.

Enter KATE, parlour maid, L.

KATE. Miss Watkins.

LADY NEVERN. Oh, Aunt Hester. Come and sit down by the fire and have some tea. [*She kisses her aunt. MISS WATKINS sits down, R.*]

MISS WATKINS. Thank you, I've had tea already. When is the wedding to be?

LADY NEVERN. On Thursday.

MISS WATKINS. It really is going to take place?

LADY NEVERN. Of course it is, Aunt Hester.

MISS WATKINS. Well, I needn't repeat to you what I've already said on the subject. You know my views; but I felt it my duty to make one final appeal to you and to lodge one last protest.

LADY NEVERN. But, dear Aunt Hester, what do you expect me to do? Forbid the marriage?

MISS WATKINS. You know as well as I do that Victoria is no more suited to Mr. Shawcross than I would be. Victoria is an extremely well-read, intelligent girl, with strikingly high ideals and a serious outlook, and the power of thinking for herself, and a great capacity for study, and you are going to let her marry a man who has never done an hour's honest work in his life, who is old enough to be her father, and whose name is a by-word for fickleness and frivolity, not to mention the unfortunate episode which took place at Wimbledon eighteen years ago. Besides which Victoria has only known him six weeks. He made up to her when he met her at Harrogate because there happened to be no one else there for him to make up to, and because she happens to be pretty and to have inherited the least estimable of your qualities.

LADY NEVERN. I quite admit that they are strangely unsuited to each other on paper. But don't those kind of marriages sometimes turn out very well? After all, Wilfrid and I were not what you would have called well suited, and yet our marriage was, as marriages go, a very happy one.

MISS WATKINS. You know that I never over-estimated Wilfrid's qualities, but I always gave him credit for unexpected common sense in big things if not in little ones, and I am sure that if he had been alive, this marriage wouldn't have happened.

LADY NEVERN. Wilfrid hadn't any more influence over Victoria than I had. If I wished to prevent the marriage—and I can't say I do—I couldn't. I can't even make Victoria drink a cup of tea.

MISS WATKINS. My dear June, do be honest. The fact is, like all mothers, you can't resist a good match. If Mr. Shawcross hadn't

unexpectedly come in for all that money there would have been no question of Victoria marrying him.

LADY NEVERN. Of course they couldn't have married with nothing to live on. But, dear Aunt Hester, what *do* you expect me to do?

MISS WATKINS. Do you imagine that Victoria knows all about Mr. Shawcross.

LADY NEVERN. Girls know everything now, and as for Victoria, her knowledge of life and of the world makes me feel like a baby in arms. She would laugh at you if you said that kind of thing to her.

MISS WATKINS. I entirely disagree. I am quite certain that you don't understand the child. Because she reads serious books and discusses intellectual topics you imagine that nothing would shock her. On the contrary, she would be far more shocked if she really realised the kind of life that Mr. Shawcross had led than an ordinary frivolous worldly-minded girl would be. However, I see it's no use for me to speak. All I do say is, that you will bitterly regret it when it's too late, only I hope you will do me the justice then to remember that I warned you.

LADY NEVERN. I shan't forget, Aunt Hester, but I really do think that you are alarming yourself unnecessarily.

MISS WATKINS. There are so many other people she might marry and to whom she would be so far better suited.

LADY NEVERN. Who, for instance?

MISS WATKINS. Well, there's that very charming Mr. Saltlake; one of the most eminent of living research-writers, with an excellent, post at Aberdeen.

LADY NEVERN. Victoria won't even let me ask him to dinner.

MISS WATKINS. Well, I suppose she has inherited your obstinacy. I won't say another word. I see that all my words are wasted.

LADY NEVERN. No, Aunt Hester. I do understand what you mean but I really don't see what I am to do.

MISS WATKINS. I suppose you told her what happened eighteen years ago at Wimbledon?

LADY NEVERN. No, I didn't. I couldn't do that. It wouldn't be fair. Besides which, that was nothing, and to tell it would be to exaggerate it out of all proportion.

MISS WATKINS. Well, I must go, but remember I warned you. Good-bye. [*She gets up and kisses LADY NEVERN.*] I only hope, dear June, I may prove wrong and you right.

She goes out, L. Enter KATE, L.

KATE. The taxi is at the door, my lady.

LADY NEVERN. The taxi?

KATE. Yes, my lady. Miss Victoria said you would be wanting a taxi at twenty minutes past five.

LADY NEVERN. Oh, yes, that's all right. I will be down in a minute. Is Miss Victoria in?

KATE. Yes, my lady. She's showing Mr. Saltlake the wedding presents in the back drawing room.

LADY NEVERN. If she asks for me tell her I have gone out, and that I shall be back in about a quarter of an hour.

KATE. Yes, my lady.

[*LADY NEVERN and KATE go out, L. As soon as she is gone out VICTORIA opens the door, L.C. Enter FRANCIS SALTlake.*]

VICTORIA. Mother's gone. We can come in here now. Let's talk while we can. Now sit down, Francis, and pay attention, because we shan't have much time. Mother will be back before very long and James will be too, soon. This may be the last opportunity we may have for an uninterrupted talk.

FRANCIS SALTlake is 30 years old. He is handsome, has rather long curly hair and a florid academical appearance.

SALTlake. I admit that it is a comfort to be able to converse

in a room. Our last conversation, you remember, was in the square. Bryanston Square is not an ideal setting for conversation in the foggy gloom of a November afternoon.

VICTORIA. Anything, my dear Francis, is better than this house as a rule. However, to get to business. I have been thinking things over seriously and carefully, and I have come to the reluctant conclusion that it is my duty to marry James in spite of everything.

SALT LAKE. Oh, Victoria, to think of you tied for the rest of your natural life to that empty-headed, smiling, fatuous, vacuous idler and trifler. You who bear the stamp of culture and the signature of science; you who are made for the higher life; you with you lofty ideals, your proud fearless disregard of convention, and your ruthless power of tearing the sophisms of the world and of society to shreds. You will be starved, my dear child; you will die of spiritual inanition and intellectual starvation. To think of the bitter disillusion, the cruel disappointments, the rude awakening that awaits you.

VICTORIA. No, Francis. That's just where you are mistaken. I have no illusions about James, so I shall not be able to suffer any disillusion. James has told me the worst about himself. What I like about him is his great candour, his fundamental honesty. You see, my dear Francis, you are not the kind of man one marries, you are the kind of man one wants to marry, and that is perhaps better. James is the kind of man one marries. I feel I need that kind of husband. I feel you are too like me. I feel that I am in too complete a sympathy with you.

SALT LAKE. I fear you feel that everything has gone too far. It is your kind-heartedness that makes you shrink from causing pain and disappointment. I love and admire you for that all the more, but would that it could have been otherwise and that we could have known each other more intimately sooner.

VICTORIA. No, it's not that at all. I'm marrying James because

I want to marry him. If he had disappointed me, if he had fallen short of my expectations, or even now were to fall short of what I demand, I should not hesitate to break off the engagement. I would walk out of the house without a word of explanation. But James has not disappointed me. It is, I think, perhaps a mistake to marry one's spiritual affinity. I do not deny that I have far more in common with you than I have with James. I do not deny that had I met you sooner all might have been different, but as things are, I cannot change them now. I have made up my mind. I am going to marry James.

SALT LAKE. That then is your last word. I must stand by and accept the sentence in silence, and see my peerless Iphigenia sacrificed on the altar of worldly convention. Well, let me bow my head to the inevitable, and consent, if in the dust, but, oh, the pity of it! The pity of it!

VICTORIA. You must always remember, Francis, that it is my own doing. I confess that when the great aunts and the cousins and all the gang of mother's friends came yesterday and made arrangements for the wedding, fully choral, with a reception here afterwards, I felt inclined to telephone to you and tell you to meet me at the Thames Hotel, to burn my boats once and for all and to get a special licence. But after all, I am my mother's child. Neither she nor I would ever do such a thing. I see through conventions, but I have in me a sense of duty, call it conventionality if you like, that I cannot wholly get rid of. It is a part of my blood and my bones. Dear Francis, I'm very sorry, we shall always be friends. I am sorry to give you pain, but what must be, must be.

SALT LAKE. To think of all we might have done together. The final chapters of my work on the pseudo-Daniel will for ever lack the gusto, the fire, the freshness, which your co-operation would have lent them. You would have been my inspiration, my courage, my industry, my Egeria, "Ah, known for my soul's birth-partner well enough!"

VICTORIA. As it is, if you send me the proofs I will correct the misprints and send you back every batch by return of post.

SALT LAKE. Alas! you will be engrossed in the stifling and cramping occupations of a different world. How different a world! Ah! what a change!

VICTORIA. I heard the bell. That's mother or James.

FRANCIS *gets up*.

SALT LAKE. I'll go.

VICTORIA. No, don't go. I want you to see James. I want you to get used to each other, and I don't want mother to think that I have been hiding you from her.

SALT LAKE. Remember, if you should change your mind before Thursday, I shall be ready. Yes, ready to do and dare all.

Enter SHAWCROSS, L.

VICTORIA. I think you've met Mr. Saltlake, James.

SHAWCROSS. I've had the honour of being introduced to Mr. Saltlake three times, but it's an honour which can't be too often repeated.

VICTORIA. Francis is distressingly absent-minded.

SALT LAKE. I beg your pardon, Mr. Shawcross. I am so short-sighted I didn't see who it was at first. It reminds me of the story—doubtless you have heard the story before—of the shy and stammering undergraduate who, when he was introduced to the Master of Balliol for the third time, said, "For the th—th—th—th—third t-t-t—t-t-t—time of asking m—m-m-m-m—master," and the master said to him, "You appear to have a just impediment, Mr. Smith."

SHAWCROSS. Jolly old boy, the master, wasn't he?

SALT LAKE. Well, he was human, human at the core, under a forbidding and chilling exterior, and nobody suffered more from shyness than he did. He was a kindly man. I remember, and this story will appeal to you, Mr. Shawcross, that one of his pupils once lost a hundred pounds at the races, and the Master not only paid the debt,

but said to the unlucky gambler, "Next time you go racing, Mr. Jones, back the horse which you think will not win."

SHAWCROSS. I got the tickets for the play.

VICTORIA. For the Russian players?

SHAWCROSS. No, they hadn't got any left. There's a tremendous run on the Russian players, so I thought I'd better get stalls at the Alhambra. It was the only theatre that had any decent places left.

SALTlake. That is unfortunate. You will miss a great treat. Those Russian players are very fine. Of course, the language is an obstacle, but their playing is so expressive, so admirable, so natural, that it hardly matters not understanding what they say. And then they are playing Mr. Gladstone's 1853 Budget. The whole of that wonderful effort, that masterpiece of dialectic and exposition is reproduced. The speech takes four and three quarter hours. It has never been done in this country before on the stage.

VICTORIA. Oh, what a pity. That would have been worth seeing.

SALTlake. There is a *matinée* to-morrow afternoon.

VICTORIA. Will you take me to-morrow afternoon, James?

SHAWCROSS. I'm afraid I can't, dear, not to-morrow afternoon. I shan't be able to get away before four o'clock. I've got some private budgets to attend to.

VICTORIA. That's unfortunate. Perhaps you would go with me, Mr. Saltlake.

SALTlake. I should be delighted. Delighted. No doubt Lady Nevern would enjoy it too.

VICTORIA. No. Mother has no head for finance drama. We will go by ourselves. You can have lunch here, and I will order the tickets.

SALTlake. Well, that will be very interesting, very interesting, I am sure. I think I must now say good-bye. Good-bye, Mr. Shawcross, and if we do not meet again before the wedding allow me to renew my good wishes.

SHAWCROSS. Thank you, Mr. Saltlake. We shall see you at the wedding. [SALT LAKE *goes out, L.*] You're not really going to that play to-morrow afternoon?

VICTORIA. Yes, James. Could you have come?

SHAWCROSS. I had arranged to have a free afternoon especially to be with you. You said you would come and help me to choose a suitcase.

VICTORIA. But why didn't you remind me, James?

SHAWCROSS. Well, as you'd forgotten all about it, and seemed to prefer to listen to a Russian play, which lasts five hours, about a disused budget, I thought you couldn't have wanted very much to go out shopping with me.

VICTORIA. Well, I'm sorry, James. You know Nachalov's impersonation of Gladstone is said to be quite wonderful. But I can easily see that another day.

SHAWCROSS. And then I suppose I'm a fearful back number as far as these things are concerned, but I can't help thinking it a little bit funny that you should want to go to the play alone with that fellow three days before we are married. Of course, I don't mind your seeing Saltlake. How could anyone mind? But I only wonder that you can put up with the fellow's society.

VICTORIA. No, you wouldn't understand that, James, but you must just believe me when I tell you that I *do* like him very much.

SHAWCROSS. You really *do* like him.

VICTORIA. Yes, very much indeed.

SHAWCROSS. You find him entertaining?

VICTORIA. I find him understanding.

SHAWCROSS. But what in the world does he understand except Assyrian inscriptions?

VICTORIA. Because a man happens to know a great deal that's no reason why one shouldn't enjoy his society.

SHAWCROSS. It's not his learning I object to, it's the lighter side of his nature. I should go off my head if I saw much of him.

VICTORIA. I'm sorry for that, as I mean to see a good deal of him after we're married. I don't expect you to give up your friends, and you mustn't expect me to give up mine.

SHAWCROSS. You've only known him three weeks.

VICTORIA. A month, to be accurate; and I have only known you five weeks and four days. I make up my mind at once about people.

SHAWCROSS. Well, I don't want to quarrel about it, and I don't want to interfere with your friends, but I'm damned if I have that man in the house.

VICTORIA. Very well, I am to understand that I shan't be able to see my friends.

SHAWCROSS. Of course, you'll be able to see anyone you please, only you'll drive me to the club.

VICTORIA. And you'll drive me to my club. Fortunately I belong to two clubs, and I can invite my men friends to either of them. You're jealous of Mr. Saltlake, James. You're not jealous of his brains, but you're jealous of his looks.

SHAWCROSS. I'm not jealous, but I don't like him. I don't like Welshmen.

VICTORIA. He's not a Welshman.

SHAWCROSS. He's one of nature's Welshmen, and I suspect him of being a Mormon.

VICTORIA. What rubbish!

SHAWCROSS. Well, he told me he had written a monograph on Mormons and that there was a lot to be said for them, and his name is Saltlake, which is in itself suspicious.

VICTORIA. James, I said I would marry you because I liked your nature, but if you're going to turn tyrant before we are married, the sooner we break off the engagement the better.

SHAWCROSS. I'm very sorry, I didn't mean it. You can see Saltlake as often as you like, and by all means go to the Russian play to-morrow.

VICTORIA. Of course I won't. We'll go and buy a nice suit case. I'll telephone to Mr. Saltlake presently.

Enter KATE, L.

KATE [*announcing*]. Mrs. Caswell.

Enter MRS. CASWELL. She is dressed in deep mourning.

VICTORIA [*getting up*]. How do you do, Leezy dear? [*They kiss each other.*] Mother is not in yet, but she won't be long. She has gone to the manicurist, but she has been away some time, and she was coming straight back. Let me introduce Mr. Shawcross to you. I don't expect you have ever met. Mother has no doubt told you that we are engaged to be married.

MRS. CASWELL [*shaking hands*]. Mr. Shawcross and I have met before, but I have not yet had the chance of congratulating him or you. Indeed, I only received your mother's letter announcing the engagement yesterday. I have been living abroad during the last weeks in great retirement. But I congratulate you now with all my heart. When is the wedding to be?

VICTORIA. Next Thursday, at the parish church. I would far rather be married before the Registrar, but mother wouldn't hear of it, and James is rather old-fashioned about that sort of thing.

MRS. CASWELL. I agree with him. There is something rather unsatisfactory about the registrar's office.

VICTORIA. I'm all for doing as people want to. If it gives them pleasure for me to dress up in white satin and hear "The Voice that breathed o'er Eden," and eat wedding cake, and throw rice at us, by all means let them do it.

Enter KATE.

KATE. The dressmaker is here, miss.

VICTORIA. All right, I'm coming. [*Exit KATE.*] I thought I'd finished trying on, but I suppose I must go. James, you must amuse Leezy till mother comes back. I shan't be a moment.

Exit VICTORIA.

MRS. CASWELL. Well, James?

SHAWCROSS [*much embarrassed*]. Oh, won't you sit down?

MRS. CASWELL. I understand now why I received no answer to my letter informing you of Robert's death.

SHAWCROSS. I never got it, I had no idea. You see, I've been away at Harrogate. We only came back this week, and I've been living at the club. I've given up my rooms as we're going to take a house, so I got no letters. I can't say how—how deeply I sympathise. When did this sad blow fall on you?

MRS. CASWELL. A month ago, in Switzerland. I thought you would be the first person to write.

SHAWCROSS. Of course. So I would have been, but I assure you I had no idea.

MRS. CASWELL. It was in *The Times*.

SHAWCROSS. You know what a careless reader I am. I can't say how distressed—I don't know how to put it.

MRS. CASWELL. You needn't, James. It was altogether a merciful release—for him.

SHAWCROSS. Was it sudden?

MRS. CASWELL. Yes, quite sudden. Influenza followed by double pneumonia. But don't let's talk about that, let's talk about you. So you are going to marry Victoria Nevern? How strange life is, isn't it?

SHAWCROSS. You know her well, I suppose?

MRS. CASWELL. Of course, I have known her ever since she was born. I haven't seen so much of them lately, since I've been abroad, but I have never lost touch with June, and we have corresponded quite regularly. But what a strange person for you to

marry, James. She knows as much as an Oxford don, and she's a young lady with very decided views.

SHAWCROSS. Oh, I know all that.

MRS. CASWELL. But she has something of her mother. She has her mother's looks and her Aunt Hester's character. You must be careful, James. Does she know all about you?

SHAWCROSS. Oh, what she doesn't know about me isn't knowledge. Victoria is very broad-minded. That's what I like about her.

MRS. CASWELL. I hope you'll be very happy.

SHAWCROSS. Thank you.

MRS. CASWELL. I must get you a wedding present.

SHAWCROSS. Oh, please don't trouble.

MRS. CASWELL. What shall it be? A meerschaum pipe or a cigar case? Or doesn't Victoria like the smell of cigars?

SHAWCROSS. On the contrary, she smokes cigars herself sometimes.

MRS. CASWELL. And I never congratulated you on your legacy. You're a rich man now, James, and you will be richer still when you're married. Everything comes if one waits, but sometimes it comes too late. I have come into a little something too. Robert's eldest brother died and left him everything. It's all mine now. Fancy, if I had had that—how long ago was it? nineteen years—nineteen years ago we first met?

SHAWCROSS. Yes, fancy.

MRS. CASWELL. Well, I shall have a comfortable old age, if a lonely one.

Enter VICTORIA.

VICTORIA. James, you must go and dress for dinner or else you'll be late. We dine at seven. I can't think what has happened to mother, she must have missed her appointment.

SHAWCROSS. All right, I'll go and dress. Good-bye Mrs. Caswell. I won't be late.

MRS. CASWELL. Good-bye, Mr. Shawcross.

SHAWCROSS *goes out, L.*

VICTORIA [*sitting down*]. You've met James before, Leezy?

MRS. CASWELL. Yes, a long time ago. I used to know him quite well at one time. That was a long time ago. I knew him before your mother was married.

VICTORIA. You know, you can be quite frank with me, Elsie. You know me well enough to know that I like people to be quite frank with me. Do you think I am doing a wise thing in marrying James Shawcross?

MRS. CASWELL. Well, I should think you are the only judge.

VICTORIA. I am fond of him, and I thought I was in love with him, but now I'm not sure I am. I have a sort of feeling he may disappoint me.

MRS. CASWELL. Your mother and I have always thought you to be a very shrewd judge of character.

VICTORIA. So I am, and please don't think I should have any disillusion. I know all about James' "past." I mean I know that he has always made up to someone, and always been devoted to about three people at once. I don't mind that,—in fact I think that is all to the good. All to the good that having happened.

MRS. CASWELL. But you wouldn't like it to go on happening?

VICTORIA. Oh, if he marries me, it wouldn't go on happening. At least, if it did, I should walk out of the house. You see, divorces are so easy now. I have no prejudices against divorce.

MRS. CASWELL. It's not always easy. But isn't it a little late in the day to be thinking this? The wedding is the day after tomorrow, isn't it?

VICTORIA. Yes. That's why now is just the time to think of these things, before it's too late. You see, James has been very honest and truthful to me. That's what I like about him. He has told me everything—everything.

MRS. CASWELL. Yes?

VICTORIA. You don't believe it? But it's true—everything. He even showed me his old photographs. He was refreshingly frank.

MRS. CASWELL. I suppose he told you how history had repeated itself.

VICTORIA. How what?

MRS. CASWELL. Oh, that was nothing. A funny little incident, a mere passing flirtation, but it is funny. Didn't your mother tell you?

VICTORIA. She told me nothing.

MRS. CASWELL. Oh, in that case I won't say anything.

VICTORIA. But I insist. Now you have said so much, you must tell me everything.

MRS. CASWELL. It was nothing. It is not worth telling.

VICTORIA. History repeated itself. He was in love with mother?

MRS. CASWELL. Well, now that you have guessed I suppose I must tell you. I wouldn't tell any other girl, but I don't mind telling you, Victoria dear, you will understand. When your mother was engaged to your father she felt at the last moment, just before the wedding, a few days before the wedding, that she didn't want to marry him, the fact being that she had met Mr. Shawcross. She was living at Wimbledon then, and they had a mild flirtation. Well, she ran away to London, and Mr. Shawcross was arranging for them to be married. I happened to be staying with your grandfather at the time; at least, I arrived the night your mother left, and your grandfather and your grandmother sent me to London to bring your mother back, which I did; she was only too glad to come back. She married your father and lived happily for ever afterwards, and never set eyes on Mr. Shawcross again.

VICTORIA. Oh! I see. That's why he wanted to marry me; I remind him of mother. He is marrying me on the strength of a likeness. Isn't that the title of a book or a story?

MRS. CASWELL. Of course, it was nothing. The most harmless and natural of escapades.

VICTORIA. Yes, of course. The most harmless and natural of escapades. Romance was still just dying out in those days, and I am sure mother had still vague ideas of Gretna Green. But how funny; how very funny; and how odd of James not to tell me. I see why he didn't. He thought I should mind if I had thought that he had been originally attracted to me because I reminded him in any way of mother. That he liked me on the strength of a likeness, and probably mother thought the same too.

MRS. CASWELL. Whereas that's the last thing you would have minded.

VICTORIA. The very last thing. But how different mother and I are. How differently I should behave in the same circumstances. I mean if I felt now that I couldn't marry James, the last thing I should do would be to run away. I should just as soon think of being married at Gretna Green.

MRS. CASWELL. I suppose you would have told Mr. Shawcross and your mother at once.

VICTORIA. At once. But I'm so glad you told me, Leezy. I shall have such fun chaffing James about it, such fun.

MRS. CASWELL. Don't tell him I told you.

VICTORIA. Of course not, I shall pretend I always knew. Do you know, I am afraid I shall have to go up and dress soon. We are dining early, but if you don't mind waiting, I am sure mother won't be long.

MRS. CASWELL. I'm afraid I can't wait any longer. Please tell your mother that I was so sorry to miss her, and that I will try to find her another day.

VICTORIA. She's in every evening, and you'll come to the wedding, won't you, on Thursday? The day after to-morrow, at two-thirty. I forget what the church is called, but it's here, round the corner.

Grandpapa has composed a special wedding march for the occasion, as I can't stand either Mendelssohn or Wagner.

MRS. CASWELL. I shall be sure to come. Good-bye, Victoria dearest, and good luck.

VICTORIA. Good-bye, Leezy dear, and thank you for telling me. Do you want a taxi?

MRS. CASWELL. No, thank you, I will walk. [*They kiss each other.*]

MRS. CASWELL goes out, L. VICTORIA goes to the telephone, which is on the writing table, L.

VICTORIA. Gerrard 3253. Is that the Thames Hotel? This is Miss Nevern speaking. I want a bedroom, a sitting-room, and bathroom for to-night. Yes, looking out on to the river. What number? Thank you. And I want dinner for two in the sitting-room at eight-fifteen. One Martini cocktail, some soup, some fish, a roast partridge, and a soufflé. Half a bottle of light white wine and a bottle of Evian water; coffee, cigarettes and cigars. Yes. 2351 Museum. Is that you, Francis? I want you to dine with me at the Thames to-night, at eight-fifteen. No, the Thames. No, we should miss the beginning. Yes, get two stalls for to-morrow afternoon. We will have lunch there at one. I will explain when I see you. [*She rings the electric bell on the table.*] You quite understand, the Thames at eight. No, in a private sitting room. Ask for my sitting room, number 343. Is that clear? Good-bye. [*Enter KATE.*] Is her ladyship in?

KATE. Yes, miss. Her ladyship has been in some time. She is dressing.

VICTORIA. Very well. I want a taxi. If her ladyship asks for me, tell her I have gone out and that I will telephone to her, and tell Woods to come up to my room at once.

KATE. Very good, Miss.

VICTORIA and KATE go out.

CURTAIN.

ACT III.

Lady Nevern's drawing room, as in Act II. The next morning

LADY NEVERN *at the telephone.*

LADY NEVERN. Is that you, James? Victoria has just telephoned to say that she will be round here at eleven. Could you possibly get here before she arrives? I should like to talk to you for a moment alone first. That will be splendid. Good-bye. [*She rings off.*]

Enter KATE.

KATE. Mr. Palmer.

Exit KATE.

LADY NEVERN. Oh, papa.

MR. PALMER. Well, here I am, in time for the wedding which to-morrow is not. "Brightly dawns our wedding day." And here's the wedding march. I thought you might like me to play it over to you, although of course it won't sound so well on the piano.

LADY NEVERN. Sit down, papa. [*He sits down.*] I'm not at all sure there will be a wedding after all. Victoria for some unaccountable reason—well, the fact is, she has run away.

MR. PALMER. Dear me. [*Humming*]: She's kilted her skirts of green satin, she's kilted them up to the knee, and she's off with Lord Ronald Macdonald." Dear me.

LADY NEVERN. She went away last night while I was dressing for dinner.

MR. PALMER. But where to?

LADY NEVERN. She's gone to the Thames Hotel, and she doesn't want to marry James Shawcross any more. She wants to marry a man called Saltlake. I don't think you know him. He's something to do with a Scotch University.

MR. PALMER [*humming*]: "La donna è mobile." Saltlake, no, I don't know him. I know a man called Freshwater, who composed a very fair quartette. I'm sorry. I always liked Shawcross. He used to be so obliging, and had a really remarkable sense of rhythm. Can't anything be done?

LADY NEVERN. She threatened to be married as soon as possible by special licence. Then I talked to her and to Mr. Saltlake on the telephone, and Victoria agreed to wait till to-morrow. They are both coming round here presently.

MR. PALMER. Then I shall be in the way. I'm sorry for Shawcross. [*Hums*]: "Che farò senza Eurydice?" I had better go home by the next train.

LADY NEVERN. No, papa, don't go. I am expecting James at any moment, and when he comes you might leave us alone a minute and go into the next room. There's a piano there.

MR. PALMER. Of course.

Enter KATE.

KATE [*announces*]. Mr. Shawcross.

Exit KATE. MR. PALMER goes into the next room, L.C., as SHAWCROSS comes in, L. During the next scene MR. PALMER is heard playing tune after tune on the piano.

LADY NEVERN. My dear James, papa has arrived, and he's gone into the next room, as I want to see you alone. Victoria may be here any minute. I got on to Mr. Saltlake on the telephone this morning.

SHAWCROSS. Oh! what did he say?

LADY NEVERN. He agreed to do nothing before he had seen me. He does not wish to marry Victoria without my consent, so he has taken no steps, as yet,—at least I don't think so.

SHAWCROSS. And what did Victoria say this morning? You talked to her too.

LADY NEVERN. Yes. She still says she has absolutely made up her mind to marry Mr. Saltlake. When she speaks like that she generally means it. She has told Aunt Hester too, who, of course, is quite delighted.

SHAWCROSS. Well, there's nothing to be done, is there?

LADY NEVERN. We'll see when she comes. After all, history may repeat itself to the end.

SHAWCROSS. I wonder.

LADY NEVERN. I wonder.

SHAWCROSS. But it's very surprising all the same; I mean the way it happened.

LADY NEVERN. Very surprising. By the way, did Victoria have any talk with Elsie Caswell after you left her yesterday?

SHAWCROSS. I don't know. I left them together, but they would not have had time to say much to each other.

LADY NEVERN. Elsie is a widow now.

SHAWCROSS. Yes, I know.

LADY NEVERN. I don't think she's changed much.

SHAWCROSS. She was in deep mourning.

LADY NEVERN. She knows it suits her. I'm spiteful, but you know James, I have never quite forgiven Elsie.

SHAWCROSS. Oh, I can't tell you to what extent I have never forgiven her.

LADY NEVERN. Is that true, James?

SHAWCROSS. Yes, quite true, didn't you know? I thought you always had known. I thought you must have known.

Enter VICTORIA and MR. SALTlake.

VICTORIA. Good morning, mother. Good morning, James. [*She shakes hands with SHAWCROSS.*]

SALT LAKE. Good morning, Lady Nevern. Good morning, Mr. Shawcross.

VICTORIA *sits down*. SALT LAKE *sits down on her left*.

LADY NEVERN *sits down facing VICTORIA*.

VICTORIA. Francis refused to be married unless we came here first. I wished to be married first and discuss it afterwards. I thought it would save you trouble, and altogether be more convenient for you to be faced with a *fait accompli*. I thought it would save you a world of explanations, but Francis is curiously old-fashioned about some things, and as it is only a question of a few hours I thought I would let him have his way. But we have made up our minds.

LADY NEVERN. I confess I don't understand you, Victoria darling. Why did you say nothing to James yesterday afternoon?

VICTORIA. For the simple reason that I did not know when I saw him that he had wanted to marry you eighteen years ago, and that you actually went so far as running away to London with him. That is so, is it not? It was Elsie who told me.

LADY NEVERN. Oh!

VICTORIA. Let me make myself quite plain. I know there was no harm in your escapade. I know you came back at once; I know it meant nothing to you or to him, but, curiously enough, it makes all the difference to me. It shows me that James' attraction towards me was a second-hand attraction. He liked me because in some odd way I reminded him of you, different as we are, mother dear. He was going to marry me on the strength of a likeness. You see, you neither of you dared tell me about this episode, because you no doubt both of you knew, consciously or unconsciously, that it would make all the difference to *me*. James told me everything except that, and that, as it happens, is the only thing that matters to me. I don't mind any of the other things he did. I shouldn't have minded if he had a divorced wife hidden somewhere, but I do mind that, and I mind his not having told me. That fact made

me realise in a flash that I didn't love him at all, and that I couldn't dream of marrying him. It also made me realise that I love someone else. I love Francis, and we are going to be married. Am I right, Francis?

SALT LAKE. Subject to your mother's consent, dear Victoria. Subject to your mother's consent, such a marriage would fulfil a dream which I had looked upon as impossible of realisation.

VICTORIA. So there is nothing to be done except to make the necessary arrangements. We shall have to send back the wedding presents and put off all the guests. I have already told them at the church. We will be married by special licence, if possible to-morrow morning, and we will start to-morrow evening for Florence, where we will spend our honeymoon.

LADY NEVERN. You don't seem to take James into consideration at all.

VICTORIA. I want to speak to James now, and alone, so please all of you, leave me. You, Francis, can go up into my sitting room. I will let you know when I've finished. I'll ring you up.

LADY NEVERN. Very well, darling, we will leave you.

LADY NEVERN *goes into the back drawing room and*
SALT LAKE *goes out, L.*

VICTORIA. James, if I've done anything to annoy you, I'm sorry, but I don't think I have. Directly I left this house I realised in the peace and isolation of the Thames Hotel the truth of the situation. For the first time I saw things as they are; I realised that I should have made you very unhappy. You see, James, I am a born high-brow, just like Aunt Hester. The fact must be faced. I *look* more like mother, but I *am* like Aunt Hester. Like all high-brows, I have moments when I think I should like to escape into what is sometimes called the gay world. Of course, I know, and you know still better than I do, that there is nothing so dreary as the so-called gay world to those who

are in it. To them it is a treadmill, but to those who are outside it it sometimes gives the illusion of glamour. But, if one is reasonable, one very soon realises that it is a false illusion. I am reasonable. It is a mercy all this was brought home to me in time. A mercy for both of us. You are trying hard to conceal what an immense relief it is to you. Don't say anything, James. We both understand each other perfectly. And all this was brought about by Elsie Caswell's indiscretion. Tell me, James, after what happened eighteen years ago, did you go on knowing Elsie?

SHAWCROSS. Yes, I used to see her very often; about once a week, for several years. In fact, till the war. Then we drifted apart. Her husband had a job in the Red Cross, and afterwards at Geneva.

VICTORIA. Did you write to each other?

SHAWCROSS. She used to write to me. I was never a very good correspondent, but I sent her picture postcards from time to time. And during the war I sometimes sent her those printed postcards on which there was a choice of non-committal statements, such as "I am quite well"; "I am not wounded."

VICTORIA. Did you write and tell her of our engagement?

SHAWCROSS. No, I didn't. I didn't know where she was.

VICTORIA. It's all as clear as daylight.

SHAWCROSS. What is clear?

VICTORIA. Well, it was she who stopped mother running away with you, wasn't it?

SHAWCROSS. Yes, it was; but, you know, she was quite right. I hadn't got a cent in those days. I don't know what we should have lived on.

VICTORIA. And it was she who stopped you marrying me. Well, she was quite right there, too. But why did she do it?

SHAWCROSS. I can't think.

VICTORIA. Don't you really know? It's as plain as daylight to me. She has made up her mind to marry you herself. She couldn't

do that before because her husband was alive, but now—my dear James, don't you see?

SHAWCROSS. Do you really think?

VICTORIA. I don't think, I am quite sure. And if you're not very careful she'll succeed. I expect you are like wax in her hands.

SHAWCROSS. Well, to tell you the truth, I am. Elsie Caswell is a very determined woman. Very gentle, but very determined. I have always found it very difficult to say no to anybody, but quite impossible to say no to her. And then, you see, she knows me too well. She knows my weak points.

VICTORIA. Exactly. Well, there's only one way out of the difficulty.

SHAWCROSS. What?

VICTORIA. You must get married at once.

SHAWCROSS. But since you won't marry me, whom am I to marry?

VICTORIA. Why, mother, of course. I understand now that mother must always have been in love with you. I see it all so plainly. You are exactly suited to each other. Of course, poor father bored her to tears. He was very worthy, but a half-wit, with unexpected glimmerings of common sense. Mother behaved like an angel to him always, but she must have gone through a good deal!

SHAWCROSS. It's too late. She wouldn't dream of it now.

VICTORIA. Of course she would. I shan't rest till it's settled.

Enter KATE.

KATE. Mrs. Caswell wants to know if you could see her, miss.

VICTORIA. Did you say I was in?

KATE. Yes, miss. I said you were talking to Mr. Shawcross. She said she wanted to see Mr. Shawcross very particularly too.

VICTORIA. Show her into the back drawing room.

KATE. Very good, miss.

Exit KATE.

SHAWCROSS. For heaven's sake, don't leave me alone with her.

VICTORIA. You needn't see her at all. As soon as she's in the back drawing room you can escape.

SHAWCROSS. I feel that all is up. For heaven's sake, don't desert me. Elsie is a woman of infinite resources, and she doesn't know what it means to be defeated. There's nothing she won't do to get her way.

VICTORIA. I know. But I am a match for her, James, I assure you.

Enter MR. PALMER and MRS. CASWELL from the back drawing-room, L.C.

MR. PALMER. My dear, here is Leezy, who has come to see you. She wants to see you, and your mother has just gone to fetch something. How do you do, Shawcross. We haven't met for I don't know how long. But I won't disturb you. I know you are—er busy, and in fact, I am wanted. June wants me. Good-bye.

He goes out hurriedly, humming a tune from Gounod's "Romeo and Juliet": "Oh, jour de deuil."

MRS. CASWELL [*kissing her*]. Dear Victoria. How do you do, Mr. Shawcross?

VICTORIA. Leezy dear, have you been having a talk with father?

MRS. CASWELL. No, I've just this moment come. He hurried me in to you. [*Laughing.*] He was in a desperate hurry to get rid of me. I've brought you a tiny little present. This little wrist-watch. I thought it might be useful.

VICTORIA. Thank you so much, Leezy.

MRS. CASWELL. And the wedding is at two-thirty, at what church?

VICTORIA. You haven't got mother's letter.

MRS. CASWELL. No.

VICTORIA. She's written to you, I think, or, at any rate, she is writing. Everything has been altered. The public wedding has been cancelled. I'm going to be married quite quietly. We are putting off everyone.

MRS. CASWELL. No bad news, I hope.

VICTORIA. No. Mother's letter will explain everything to you. Don't say anything to her about it now, if you see her, as it would upset her. Pretend you know all about it.

MRS. CASWELL. Well, I daresay in a way it is a relief to you, Victoria. A public wedding is always very trying. I suppose you will have a few friends.

VICTORIA. Only grandpapa.

SHAWCROSS. I must be going. [*Looking at his watch*] I shall be late for my appointment.

VICTORIA. Before you go, James, there is just one thing I want to settle with you. I'll come downstairs with you. I won't be a moment, Elsie.

MRS. CASWELL. I must go, too. Good-bye, dear. I won't bother any of you now. I'll just say good-bye to Mr. Palmer. Good-bye, Victoria. Will you ask Kate to call me a taxi? Good-bye, Mr. Shawcross.

SHAWCROSS. Good-bye, Mrs. Caswell.

VICTORIA and SHAWCROSS go out, L. *As soon as they are out* MRS. CASWELL opens the door, L., and calls down the banisters.

MRS. CASWELL. Mr. Shawcross. Would you come up for one moment. Lady Nevern's here. She wants to see you. [*Enter SHAWCROSS, L.*] Lady Nevern isn't here. It's I who want to see you for a moment. I insist on knowing what is happening. You are keeping me in the dark, as indeed you have always done, all your life. Why has the public wedding been put off?

SHAWCROSS. Well, the fact is, we quarrelled with the clergyman.

MRS. CASWELL. Which clergyman? Who is he?

SHAWCROSS. He's the parish clergyman. His name is Wilkinson.

MRS. CASWELL. Oh, really, what about?

SHAWCROSS. Well, Victoria wanted some words in the marriage service changed. She wanted the word "obey" left out, and he's,

well, he's very high church, and he wouldn't do it. So Victoria thought she would rather be married before the registrar. So we put off everything.

The telephone bell rings.

MRS. CASWELL. That's the house telephone. You'd better answer.

SHAWCROSS [*taking off the receiver*]. Hullo. No, Shawcross speaking. No. She's gone out. Oh, I'm not sure whether she has actually gone; just hold on for a minute, I'll find out. [*He replaces the receiver on the telephone.*] How stupid of me, I've cut them off now, and I don't know their number.

MRS. CASWELL. What nonsense; that was the house telephone. It must have been someone speaking either from Victoria's sitting room or June's bedroom. Who was it?

MRS. CASWELL *is standing opposite the fireplace.* SHAWCROSS *walks towards her.*

SHAWCROSS. I don't know. I haven't the slightest idea. Someone who wanted to speak to Victoria. A man's voice, I think.

MRS. CASWELL. A man? In Victoria's sitting room? Why did you say at first that she was out, and then that you were not sure?

SHAWCROSS. Well, I thought, you see, it might be someone she didn't want to see, and then I thought it was perhaps someone she might want to see.

MRS. CASWELL. What is all this mystery? What was his name? He must have said his name.

SHAWCROSS. No, that's just the odd thing. He said, "Is that you, Victoria?" I mean he said: "Is that you, Miss Nevern?" He didn't say who he was nor where he was speaking from.

MRS. CASWELL. James, it's no good. You're not telling me the truth. I know that tone of voice only too well.

SHAWCROSS. Honour bright. I don't know who the man was. I couldn't hear what he was saying properly. These extensions are so faint.

MRS. CASWELL. You are all keeping me in the dark.

SHAWCROSS. What should we keep you in the dark about? Victoria is going to be married before the Registrar instead of in church. I swear to you that's the gospel truth.

The telephone bell rings again. MRS. CASWELL goes to the writing table and takes up the receiver.

MRS. CASWELL. Who is speaking? Francis. Francis who? Francis Saltlake. This is Mrs. Caswell speaking. I'm in Lady Nevern's drawing room. I see, from Victoria's sitting-room. No, she's not gone out. Yes, I'll tell her. She'll be here in a minute. Yes, certainly; please come down.

SHAWCROSS [*in an agonised loud whisper*]. No, no, don't let him come down here.

MRS. CASWELL. Hold on one minute, please?

SHAWCROSS. Victoria particularly doesn't want to see him. I'll explain everything; only prevent him coming.

MRS. CASWELL. Will you wait a moment, Mr. Saltlake? I will give you a call presently. [*She puts back the receiver.*] Who is this Francis Saltlake who's been waiting, he says, hours in Victoria's sitting-room and wants to see her, and calls her Victoria?

SHAWCROSS. Well, he's a friend of her Aunt Hester's. Don't let him come down. We shall never get rid of him. And now I really must go. I've got an extremely important appointment with my lawyer.

MRS. CASWELL [*standing in front of the door*]. I know those appointments, James. You shall not go till this mystery is explained.

SHAWCROSS. But I never set eyes on the man in my life till yesterday. At least, I never spoke to him till yesterday. I met him twice at Aunt Hester's house.

MRS. CASWELL. Then he was here yesterday?

SHAWCROSS. Yes. Aunt Hester brought him.

MRS. CASWELL [*taking a "Who's Who" from the writing table and*

looking up a name, reads out]. Saltlake, Francis Edward Havergal, son of Francis . . . [*skipping*], born 1878. Educated Rugby and Keble College, Oxford. Lecturer on Chaldaic Antiquities at Aberdeen, 1903-8. Publications: "Sidelights on Nebuchadnezzar," "The Abraham Myth," "Nineveh Revisited." Recreations: fencing, draughts.

Enter SALT LAKE, L.

SALT LAKE. Where is Victoria?

SHAWCROSS. I really don't know.

MRS. CASWELL. Will you introduce Mr. Saltlake to me, Mr. Shawcross?

SHAWCROSS. Certainly. Mrs. Caswell—Mr. Saltlake.

MRS. CASWELL. I am one of Victoria's oldest friends, Mr. Saltlake. I have known her ever since she was born.

SALT LAKE. I am charmed to make the acquaintance of one of Victoria's oldest friends, but could you tell me where she is now? I was to wait for her in her sitting room while she was discussing certain arrangements with her mother. Evidently that is all finished.

MRS. CASWELL. Victoria is downstairs in the study.

SALT LAKE. I will go to her at once. I wish we could have seen you after the ceremony, Mrs. Caswell, but Victoria has no doubt explained to you that we are holding no reception on the wedding day. Just a quiet lunch at the hotel.

MRS. CASWELL. I didn't know you were the best man, Mr. Saltlake.

SALT LAKE. I? Oh dear, haven't you heard? Mr. Shawcross will explain everything to you. I must really go to Victoria at once. I beg you to excuse me. I must fly.

SALT LAKE goes out, L.

MRS. CASWELL. Well, James, what does it all mean?

SHAWCROSS. I think Victoria would rather tell you herself. In fact, she asked me to say nothing till she had a talk with you.

Enter MR. PALMER, L.C.

MR. PALMER. Ah, Leezy. No doubt you have been told.

MRS. CASWELL. No, Mr. Palmer, I know nothing. I understand nothing. Please tell me what has happened.

MR. PALMER. My dear, June is waiting for me. Mr. Saltlake, I mean Shawcross, will explain everything to you.

MR. PALMER *goes out*, L.C. *Enter* MISS WATKINS, L.

MISS WATKINS. Good morning, Elsie. Good morning, Mr. Shawcross. I am sure Mr. Shawcross will not think me rude when I say that I think she is wise and right in marrying Mr. Saltlake. They are admirably suited to each other in every way. Where are June and Frederick? I understood they were here.

MRS. CASWELL. Mr. Palmer is in the next room, Aunt Hester. I don't know where June is.

MISS WATKINS. I will see you later, Elsie.

MISS WATKINS *bows to* MR. SHAWCROSS *and goes out*, L.C.

MRS. CASWELL. So that is what has happened, and you silly, silly boy, you were ashamed to tell me. Didn't you think I would understand? My poor dear James. I don't condole because I think you are well out of it.

SHAWCROSS. I think you are very heartless, Elsie.

MRS. CASWELL. You mean you loved her.

SHAWCROSS. You have ruined my life.

MRS. CASWELL. I?

SHAWCROSS. It was your doing. You told her about—

MRS. CASWELL. About what happened eighteen years ago.

SHAWCROSS. Yes.

MRS. CASWELL. But she didn't think—

SHAWCROSS. She thought I was fond of her because she was like her mother, and she couldn't forgive my not having told her.

MRS. CASWELL. Well, I was right in the past and I am right now. You wouldn't have been happy. How could you be happy with a girl like Victoria? Mr. Saltlake is made for her. I'm so sorry, James,

but you will get over it. Very soon, too, I promise you, and you shan't be lonely. I will look after you. Now listen. You shall come and have dinner with me to-night in my flat in Halkin Street. Such a cosy little flat it is, and I've got such a good cook and still some of the old Burgundy you used to like, and, if you like, afterwards we will go to the Hippodrome where you can smoke.

SHAWCROSS. Well, you know, I'm not sure I can to-night. The fact is, I'm half engaged, but I'll try and get out of it. I'll ring up.

Enter JUNE, L.

JUNE. Leezy, dear. Your taxi wants to know whether he's to wait.

MRS. CASWELL. Oh, I quite forgot the taxi, I'll go. Good-bye, James. Ring me up. I'm in the book. Good-bye, dearest June. They have told me all about everything. I'll look in in a few days time when everything is over.

They kiss each other. MRS. CASWELL goes out, L.

LADY NEVERN. Victoria has gone out with Mr. Saltlake. She asked me to tell you that she had escaped to avoid explanations, and she said she was sorry not to have been able to come to the rescue.

SHAWCROSS. I got through it rather well on the whole. You see, Victoria had told Elsie nothing, so there was a little confusion at first.

LADY NEVERN. Yes, I see.

SHAWCROSS. Elsie has a lot to answer for.

LADY NEVERN. Are you unhappy, James?

SHAWCROSS. I wasn't thinking of *now*. I was thinking of what happened years ago. Victoria was quite right. All I liked in her was that she sometimes reminded me of you. The trouble is she isn't really like you at all, and she knows it.

LADY NEVERN. But after all, we couldn't have done it, James, could we?

SHAWCROSS. We *should* have done it if it hadn't been for Elsie, whether we could or not.

LADY NEVERN. You did regret that we didn't go through with it sometimes?

SHAWCROSS. Yes I did, all my life.

LADY NEVERN. So did I.

SHAWCROSS. But is it too late, June, to make it all right now? I'm not so very old, and you are much younger than Victoria. Let us make it all right. Let us be married.

LADY NEVERN. What would Victoria think?

SHAWCROSS. She would be delighted. She told me so herself.

LADY NEVERN. I suppose I ought to say I must have time to think it over, and that it's so sudden and such a shock and so awkward and so difficult, and what will everyone think. But if you really want to know what I think and what I feel, James, it's this, that I've loved you all my life, and if you don't think I'm too old—I'm thirty-six—I'll marry you when and where you like.

Enter MR. PALMER, L.C.

MR. PALMER. I'm disturbing you.

LADY NEVERN. Not at all, papa. We have got some news for you.

MR. PALMER. Dear me, more news. Has Victoria broken off her engagement again? Has Mr. Saltlake gone off like Lohengrin? [*Hums*] "Du Lieber schwan"

LADY NEVERN. No, darling papa. But be prepared for a shock, all the same. It is I who am going to marry James.

MR. PALMER. But I'm delighted. I can't tell you how pleased I am, James. I suppose I may now call you James. I always liked you, James. I never could understand why you didn't marry June years ago. So we shall have a wedding after all. [*Hums Mendelssohn's "Wedding March."*]

Enter VICTORIA.

VICTORIA. Well, have you?

SHAWCROSS. Yes.

VICTORIA. Well, I'm delighted. [*The telephone bell rings. VICTORIA goes to the telephone and answers it.*] Yes, he's here. James, Elsie wants to speak to you.

SHAWCROSS [*going to the telephone*]. Hullo, is that you, Elsie? Yes, speaking. Well, I'm afraid I can't. The fact is, I'm engaged. No, not to dinner, to be married to June Nevern.

CURTAIN.

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